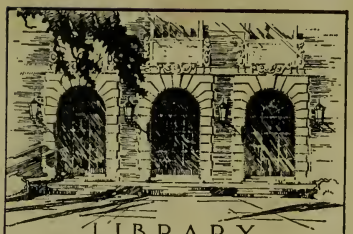

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
Ol3lil
v.3

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

http://www.archive.org/details/illiesiearbeinq03ollp

LILLIESLEAF:

BEING A CONCLUDING SERIES

OF

PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF

MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND,

OF SUNNYSIDE.

WRITTEN BY HERSELF.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1855.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

823
Ol3 lil
v.3

LILLIESLEAF.

CHAPTER I.

When Rhoda and me went back again out of Lilliesleaf to my own house at Sunnyside, the March weather was coming on, and very bleak and bitter it was, though grand weather for the country, being as dry and dusty as heart could desire; but I doubt it was very dowie to the like of Rhoda, being a bairn little used to country places, or to such a quiet life, and having

few things that she could divert herself with, at her own hand. Truly, I would not say but she was very sore wearied of me and Jenny, and the small bit world within the thorn hedge of Sunnyside, and would have been blythe to go away with Mr. Bernard, had he come in this time, even though it was to poortith and a life of trouble. But the news were not very grand news from Mr. Bernard either. The lad made very little progress, so far as I could learn, and being aye in an expectation from some person, and sore and often disappointed, was little like to be sweeter in his spirit than when he was dwelling here; and truly, Rhoda also was very crabbed many a day, from the reflection, doubtless, of what was in his letters, and would be bitter, too, in her fashion, upon the heartlessness of the world. Truly, I see not, myself,

what call the world had to come out of its way to succour the like of these young folk; but we are weak mortal creatures, and aye unreasonable in the things that concern ourselves.

Now, it was about this season, as I think, that Rhoda got a letter from her father, which was a very sore displeasure to the bairn. I think not she had gotten above two letters from him since they parted, and this being all against her betrothing, and reflecting upon her for foolishness, and miscalling Mr. Bernard, was not very like to be pleasant to this wilful and proud girl, who had a great spirit of her own. She came to me with it in a great passion (poor bairn! before she opened it, she was as proud as a bairn could be of her father's letter) and flung it on my table, and bade me look at that. I read

it, being bidden, and I marvelled not she was perturbed; for there was great fault-finding, and small kindness in it; and with all her faults, poor thing!—and I will not say it was in her nature to be a very dutiful or observant bairn—she aye clung in her heart to her father, and counted him above all men; and woe was upon any person, gentle or simple, that seemed to mint, in Rhoda's presence, at an ill thought of her papa.

"Well!" she said to me, in her breathless, passionate way, when I had read it over. Truly, for my own part, I was slow to make a judgment upon it at all.

"Well, my dear," said I, "you did not look that your papa was to be well-pleased. Doubtless, he had far other thoughts for you."

"Other thoughts? what does *he* care, I wonder?" said Rhoda. "I daresay he would be pleased to have a rich son-in-law; but as for caring about me, I know better. And I was very fond of papa—I was, indeed; I did many a thing for him that nobody else would have done; and now, he has gone and quarrelled with Harry Bernard, all to make an enemy of Austin. Harry Bernard will not like it any better than he does; but Austin and I do not care. That is one thing certain—neither father nor brother can touch Austin and I."

"Mr. Maitland might have been better pleased if you had told him that your sister was content," said I; "and truly, it is my hope Mr. Bernard is a lad of good principle, and will please all that have any concern with him in the hinder end."

"I do not care," said Rhoda, with a bit toss of her head. "I do not see why Austin should try to please my father—and I am sure I never will again; yet I *did* love papa—I was very fond of him," said the bairn, falling into a great burst of crying, or ever I was aware, "and it is very hard to think that he cares so little for me."

Now, it happened just at this very moment, when Rhoda had laid down her face into her hands, and was greeting like to break her heart, that the misfortunate bairn Nelly, Jenny's niece, who was ever doing something at the wrong time, opened the door in a moment, in a very quick and sudden way, and, without a word of notice, put in Mr. Wallace, the minister, and another gentleman into the room. I was surprised, and put about myself, having no expectation

of any stranger; but it may well be supposed what Rhoda was, that had her face wet with her tears, and her spirit full of trouble. She never took time for a moment's thought, but sprang up off her seat, and ran from the room; and with that, Mr. Wallace, and the young lad that was with him, had their apologies to say, and made such a work about it, that I was greatly perturbed myself. They had come for no particular cause, but just being on the road; and being put out of my way to begin, I had but little to say to them, and they soon went away; whereupon I went ben to the kitchen to say a word to Nelly, and tell the silly thing what she should do when such a thing befell as a stranger gentleman coming in to Sunnyside. But truly, somebody had been before me there, for Nelly was greeting in one corner, with

her apron at her e'en, and Jenny was standing in the middle of the floor, with a very perturbed face, as if she had been flyting, and the scones which were at this moment upon the girdle, were burning black under her very e'en. Truly, I marvelled at Jenny; for if there was one thing she regarded more than another, and had a real pride in, it was the baking of the scones.

"Jenny," said I, "what ails you that you cannot lift off the girdle? The house will be full of the smell of burning—and, Nelly, you foolish bairn, wherefore did you not let me ken in time, when you saw Mr. Wallace at the gate?"

"Miss Marget," said Jenny, "she is nothing but a born fool, and that is an end o't; but I canna thole to hear a stranger flything upon the bairn, and her my ain

flesh and blood. I can give her her Paiks mysel—and well I wot, there never was one deserved them better; but I canna stand by and hear Miss Rhoda—I canna thole that, do what I will; so I behoved to take the cuttie's part—I couldna refrain —and I'm in as muckle disgrace as Nelly; and the young lady was nigh to lifting her hand upon us baith—and my whole baking ruined on the fire—and I canna thole the like, Miss Marget, let what will come at the hinder end."

Now, Nelly she ever gave the other sob in her corner, and Jenny she patted her foot upon the floor, and was in as ill a humour—the foolish body!—as ever it was my fortune to see; and as to putting forth her hand to take off the girdle, she never so much as minted at it—and if her baking was spoiled, I would fain crave who was to blame?

"Truly, Jenny," said I, "you are forgetting yourself; and I think not it becomes the like of you to set up an angry face to me. Will you burn a hole in the good girdle before my very e'en? Take you heed to your own business, as becomes you, Jenny, and then I will hearken to what you have to say; and as for this misfortunate thing—Nelly, come out of the corner, and tell me wherefore you are greeting—greeting is very poor amends—and who is it that has been flyting upon you?"

"Oh! if you please, I didna mean nae ill. I just saw the minister, and I loot him in. And it was Miss Rhoda; and she said she would lick me," said Nelly; "but I didna mean nae ill."

"Na, she's a born fuil, Miss Marget," said Jenny, putting in her word; "but I canna see anither person fall foul of her, for all that.

I tell her twenty times in the day, if I tell her aince, that her evil ways will be the ruin of me, and put me out of my good place, that has been a credit to the whole family this thirty year; but I canna thole Miss Rhoda—that can I no!—though I should never bake another scone in Sunnyside again."

"Jenny," said I, "hold your peace. It is my thought you are forgetting who you are speaking to. And do you mind your ain turns, and leave this silly bairn to me. Truly, I ken no reason why one bairn should be misfortunate more than another, Nelly Robb; and it is clean want of thought, and no a thing else. The jugs and the plates never fall out of my hands nor Jenny's; and it never happens to your auntie there, being a discreet woman, to put in strange folk into my parlour, and never let

me ken. Truly, it pleases me ill to have my quiet house perturbed and disquieted for the like of you, the youngest person in it—and for all that I would be well-pleased to do you a good turn, I will not put up with the like of this. Truly, I doubt not the smoke of these scones is into my very bed-chamber, and Miss Rhoda sore put about, being a young lady, and a stranger, and your Auntie Jenny in a great anger, which becomes her not, and is very displeasing unto me ; and all for the like of you, a bairn that will not take thought. Now, Nelly Robb, what have you to say for yoursel."

Nelly said nothing, but grat. Truly, she was a very great handful; and I could have lickit her myself, if it would not have been misbecoming for me ;—to put dispeace in my house, and make me displeased at my leal handmaiden Jenny, that had served me

faithful for five-and-thirty year, and syne to stand sobbing and greeting as if she had fallen upon some calamity — the witless thing! I could not keep my patience at her; so I thought it was the wisest way to tell Jenny to bring the tea, and go ben to my own parlour myself, for fear I should be led further. For truly, the like of that bairn can many a time bring discomfort into a peaceable house.

But, to my comfort, Rhoda came down the stair as blythe as could be, and greatly uplifted in her spirit, because she had put Jenny "in a passion," as she said. Truly there was little to choose between them. This bairn was as thoughtless as the other; and when she began to laugh, and tell me in her English tongue, all the things which Jenny, being angry, had said till her, her own trouble, though it made her greet before, had vanished from

Rhoda's mind, like to a cloud. Though it took me longer to get clear of my perturbation myself, being ill-pleased at every one of them, I could not but smile in my own spirit at the changeful mind of this bairn, and how little time a shadow abode upon it. I would not say but it was very well for her, and a great blessing; but truly it was a strange thing to me.

CHAPTER II.

It came to pass also in this season—which was a by-ordinary quiet season, seeing that Mary and Mr. Allan, and also the young lad, Mr. Bernard, were all away, and us so far from Oakenshaw, and nothing happening to us, ourselves—which made us mark every little thing the more, as was but natural—that I got a letter from my bairn, Grace, touching the same thing which had vexed Rhoda, being her father's sore objection to this troth-plight between the young thing and

Mr. Bernard; and this was what my Grace said:

"You were not aware, aunt," said my bairn in her letter, "what an important charge you had; nor was I indeed informed of the amount of responsibility we undertook in receiving Rhoda. My father writes about her prospects, and her expectations, as if Rhoda, poor girl, had been born a princess, and bitterly accuses me of indifference to her welfare, and throwing her away. Poor Rhoda! she is clever and pretty, and therefore ought to have made a good match. That was her business, and she has failed in it; and her father is furious. It is very humiliating, all this; and when I am told that I have not given my sister proper advantages, and have stood in the way of her fortune, the accusation makes me more ashamed, and more angry, than I

would like to confess to you. But where is her betrothed, and what is he about? Is he a mere poor gentleman? or is there any hope of him? We ought to try, if it is possible, to help him, and make some distinct arrangement; for Rhoda's position is not a comfortable one, and I am grieved for her. Should she not come back to me?"

"Why should I go back?" said Rhoda, when I read her this bit of my letter. "I should be no better there. I wish you had just all let it alone, and never minded us. I was very happy while Austin was here, and he was comfortable enough; but now you have forced him away, and he is miserable and cannot get on, nor live properly, nor do anything he should do. Indeed, I think it is very hard—we did not want any good advice nor anything. We did not want to settle, and all that. People may be very fond of

each other, without being married the next moment. I wish you had only let us alone—for we were far better before."

"But, my dear, you could not have abode so. It was not right," said I, not kenning what to say—for she was a very strange bairn.

"Why was it not right?" said Rhoda. "There is that poor little meek dove, Violet Primrose, has somebody who comes to see her every month or two. He is a schoolmaster, too," said the bairn, lifting up her head with a proud scornfulness, "but nobody thought it necessary to send him away to make his fortune. To make a fortune! I think I know more of the world than you do, though you are old and speak about life. How should Austin make a fortune? It is only people in trade who do it, or shopkeepers, or something like that; and we might have

been quite happy, if you had but let us alone."

"The young lad thought not so, himself; he had more sense, Rhoda," said I.

With that, the bairn grew fierce at me. "It was you who put it into his mind," said she, and with that she went away from me, in a great haste and flutter, up into her ain chamber, where she had been so well-pleased the first day she was here; but which, truly, had learned many a perturbed thought, and word of passion, since she came to dwell within it. There had been sore hearts in it before; but never a wild and unsubdued spirit like to this.

So I set myself—being troubled in my mind respecting the two, what kind of bairns they were to be trusted with the charge of their own life, or to set up a house together—to a very serious meditation what I could

do with Rhoda to give her a right thought of the meaning and the ways of this life, and who it came from, and what it was for. Truly, it was a very great thought to me what I should do, and troubled me sore; for the like of my advices, or any speech that the bairn could laugh at, and call a sermon, would have done more harm than good, and seeing she was a very clever bairn in her own mind, and me a quiet woman, little skilled to put words together, it was far from an easy thing to me. But as it chanced that very day, Jenny came to me in great tribulation to say that her niece Lilly's new marriet man, Robert Carr, a very decent lad, a mason, had happened with a great accident, and broken his leg, and was in a very ill way; and that poor Lilly, being delicate herself, and no very able to bear trouble, was just like to break her heart.

Now, doubtless, hearing this, I made no tarrying, but went up the stair to get my big cloak, and make ready to see the poor lad, and what could be done for him; so hearing Rhoda in her room, I cried upon her, and bade her come with me, and after a bit lingering for a moment the bairn consented and made ready to go. It was a very wild March day, and the dust was swirling about the road in a manner far from pleasant; also the sky was heavy and dark to look upon, and the weather was as cold as winter—for all the buds upon the hedges, and the sowers in the field. When Rhoda and me went down the brae to Burrowstoun, it maybe was about three o'clock in the day, and we had taken our dinner, being used to early hours in this country place; and being the afternoon there was little stir upon the road, and we walked fast to keep up against the snell wind,

and there was very little converse between us; so, just before we came to the town, I spoke to her at last.

"My bairn," said I, "you are going to see what the like of you kens little about—the true sorrows of this life."

The bairn gave a glance at me for a moment in a disdainful way, and then laughed.

"If I do not know them, I wonder who does?" said she. Truly, I made no answer; for I kent there were troubles in this world that I myself, an aged woman, might stand abashed and bow down before, no kenning the depths of them. The silly bairn!—casting out with her papa, or missing a festivity, or pining for the young lad, Mr. Bernard, were all the sorrows she kent; but I was more like to make my moan upon it, than to smile at her myself.

When we went in at Lilly's door, we were

started the very first moment with a groan of pain out of the room where the poor suffering lad was lying. Now Lilly had ever been a by-ordinary discreet and decent lass, and a more wiselike house I never saw, after its ain manner, being very well furnished with homely plenishing, the like of good deal chairs and tables, and an eight-day clock, and a grand chest of drawers, and even—which was a new thing in a cot-house in Burrowstoun—a bit neat little sofa where any person might sit down. There were but two rooms in the house, a but and a ben; and a very decent woman, a sister of Robert, was in the kitchen, and came to the door to let us in. There were tears in her e'en as she pointed me to the other door.

"He's very bad, Miss Marget; the doctor's yonder and Lilly, and the moans he makes gang to my heart—and nothing eases him

of his pain. It's like to make baith Lilly and me clean distracted—hear to that!—hear to that!"

The poor lad!—I went to the door of the room, myself; but only to see the poor young man, with the great drops of torment on his brow, and Lilly as white as a spirit, and as still, supporting him, and the doctor busy about his hurts, seeing what they were. Truly, a better lesson could not be, for a small or a selfish trouble; for the moans of that agony were sore to hear; and it was easy to perceive, with one glance at Lilly's face, how they were ringing and dirling every one of them, at her very heart. I steppit back, myself, out of reverence for them that were far beyond taking note of me, and went with Marget Carr, to the other room, to wait for what the doctor's word would be. Rhoda went afte me, very

quiet; she had seen Lilly's face, as well as me.

But we were aye a comfort to poor Marget, who was not allowed in her brother's room, by reason of it being little, and small space in it for any person that the doctor did not need. So this decent woman telled me all how the accident came about, and how they were very feared the poor lad was sorer hurt than a broken limb, and how another decent man, the father of a family, was killed outright. It happened at the quarry at the Blackscaur, and there had not been such an accident at Burrowstoun for many a day.

Now, this whole time, Rhoda sat upon the little sofa, whiles putting up her hand to her ear, to shut out that moan, whiles starting as if she could not bear it any more, and syne sitting down very still again, with her face

turning white and firm. I keeped my eye on her, myself, though folk may, maybe, think it was but a heartless thing to do, being in the presence of such great trouble; but truly, it was clear upon my heart, that a thoughtless bairn should be the better for kenning what of anguish and sorrow was in this world.

When the doctor came, he gave us better word; and said he saw no cause to fear but the poor lad would do well yet, though he was very sore hurt. And with that he made up a drink for him, to put him out of knowledge of his pain, being made up of laudanum, or some such thing, that is good for bringing sleep; and after a space, the poor lad was quiet, and Marget went in beside him, and Lilly, came out to speak to me. She was in a great trouble, poor thing! seeing her whole frame had been

strained to keep motionless, the time she was supporting the poor young man; and for a moment, she was like to faint, between weakness, and grief, and the great strain that had been upon her. But she said, he was easy for the moment, with the drink he had gotten, and that was aye a comfort. My heart was very sore for Lilly, for the like of this was a hard entering into the trials of life.

"And he canna help but moan—poor Robbie!" said Lilly, crying out, though it was but in a whisper, for fear of disturbing him; "though a patienter lad never tholed pain, and he's as quiet in his spirit as a man can be—for he thought it was for death, Miss Maitland; he thought nothing else, nor me either, till the doctor spoke like an angel out of heaven; and I durstna even give the Lord thanks, for the moment, nor durstna

let on to myself I believed it, for fear I would fa' down at his foot for joy."

"Ay, Lilly!" said I, "I marvel not— for joy is whiles harder to bear than pain. But oh, be thankful! for I hear there is one house turned into the house of mourning, this day."

So Lilly, she said, in the fulness of her heart, that the widow woman never would want for a friend, if the Lord spared Robbie; and syne the poor thing got anxious to be in beside her man again; and I left my charge upon her, to send to me for whatever she wanted; and so, I rose to go away; for though they were well provided to be such young folk, it was not to be thought but a time of trouble would make a great call upon Lilly; and very thankful she was of the offer. And so, Rhoda and me went away.

CHAPTER III.

"But why is it? what is it for? Why are such tortures allowed to be?" cried the bairn Rhoda in her passionate wild way, stamping her foot upon the ground, and turning round upon me. Truly, I looked for no such thing, and I was stricken silent for the moment, for it never was in my way, nor according to my up-bringing, to set myself up for a judge, upon the ways and doings of the Lord.

"You tell me God is kind, and God is

good, and then you take me to see a man in agony," cried Rhoda, with a kind of shiver, "what do you mean by it? Why are there such dreadful pains and troubles in the world? Is God pleased to see people suffer so? or what do you mean when you tell me about Providence, and the care and the love of God? I cannot understand such things. If God cared so much about the world, and was just what you say, there would be no such torments here?

"Whisht!" said I, "you are but a bairn, and it ill becomes the like of you, that ken them not, to malign the ways of the Lord; truly, for my own self, I am little given to the like of such questioning, though I am well advised there are folk in this world that make arguments among themselves upon the coming in of evil, and go astray, seeking after knowledge that is not revealed to man; but

for me, Rhoda, truly, I will make no pretences. I have aye taken the Lord at His ain good word, and ever found Him true. Trouble and pain are ill and sore, but many a good fruit comes out of them; and, truly, God is ever merciful, even when his stroke is sorest, as I ken full well."

"I do not believe it," cried Rhoda, in her wild way, "merciful! you must make me forget that groan before I can trust that. No, I do not believe it; it is cruel to bring such pain; it is frightful to look on and see people suffering. Will you tell me God does that?"

"Bairn!" said I, "hold your peace—you that ken not how to judge the like of me aright, and have no more insight into my mind than the like of that little bairn has—will you dare to judge the Lord? Truly, it is not so sad a sight to see poor Robbie Carr

groaning with his trouble, as to see the like of you, that get blessings more than you ken how to do with, lifting up an angry face to the very sky, and upbraiding the Lord. Say nothing to me, Rhoda Maitland. Truly it is a marvel to my spirit that you think not shame!"

Now I was angered; but it was not well of me. Truly, I should have sought the Lord's strength to give a wiser answer to this witless bairn. But it was not in my heart—kenning His ways for many a year, and the loving kindness that was in them, to hear the word of folly crying out against God, and take it as quiet as if it had been a common thing. After that, Rhoda spoke not to me for a long space, but went on in her hasty way, holding down her head, and with her eyes turned to the ground: and I saw well she was pondering in her heart.

"When I was a little child," she cried out suddenly, turning round again as we went upon the road, "they used to put me into a dark closet, and beat me when I was naughty. I hated them! It was cruel—horrid. I hated papa when he tried to punish me. I should hate any one who did so, I am sure I should. What is that horrible pain for?—what is it for? You never try to tell me that. I would not suffer it. I would kill myself, and have it over, if it was me."

"If you did that, Rhoda," said I, "and the Lord was cruel as you say, think you, you could so escape out of His hand? Truly I ken nothing of the secrets of the last time, nor what is beyond the veil; but I think not the Lord could put so sore a fate upon human folk as just to let them be, and leave them to their own ways. I could thole the anguish and the grief; but my heart would fail within

me at the thought of that. Oh! bairn, bairn! it is little you ken of this world. The Lord will never be still in it—never for a day. For sin and evil He will not thole in His presence; and what does He do but fight, and strive, and battle with us, that we may never get rest in our ill-doing, nor have time to forget Him, night nor day? Doubtless I also grieve and am troubled in my spirit for them that are afflicted; but the thing that makes me groan and cry out is, to see either a thoughtless bairn, or a profane person left to himself."

"But this is not a wicked man—you said so," said Rhoda, in a breathless way, and so low I scarce could hear.

"If it is Robbie Carr, take you no heed for him," said I. "He kens he is in his Father's hand, and fears nothing; and truly, the Lord needs little excuse to Robbie, being

one of His own bairns; but, Rhoda, my dear, think you well upon it. Maybe you will think it an ill word for me to say of Him that I have trusted long—but the Lord is not an unconcerned Person, suffering our pleasure, but many a time is a Man of War in this world, and will not put up with evil at no hand."

"Not even in His favourites—not even among the good people—you, who can condemn everybody else," said Rhoda, lifting up her head—silly bairn!—and trying what scorn would do.

"My bairn," said I, "it is my hope you will learn better, soon or syne; and truly, no man can raise a complaint upon the Lord for showing favour, seeing it is freely offered to every one in Him that you have many a time read about. The like of you, though you ken some arts of this world, and crafts

of men, ken very little about the world itself, nor what is in it, Rhoda Maitland. There is one adversary, and that is Sin; and there is one Friend, and that is our ain hame-born Lord, that is nigh of kin to us, though His own hand made the flesh He took upon Him. Think you well upon it, my bairn—for to reckon of the world without Him, and without the adversary, is to reckon of a thing that will pass away and leave no sign; and them that ken not the great strife, that will never be done till the end, ken little of the life of human folk."

With that I stoppit, no kenning but this bairn would give her laugh, and say I was preaching to her; for it is hard to tell how to deal with uninstructed folk. But Rhoda never said a word to me. Instead of that, she made speed upon the

road, walking faster than I could well keep up with her, and turning her head away from me; but whether she was just wearied of so long a converse, or if she was abashed at the thought of her own little troubles, and thinking upon the great grief that many a one suffered in this world, truly, I cannot tell. I am no a person to oppress a young spirit with freits or fears of evil, but I think it right that a thoughtless thing should ken what every mortal, more or less, has to go through—being no less things than trial, and sorrow, and sharp affliction, and the valley of the shadow of death. I am but a single gentlewoman myself, and never kent the cares of a family for my own hand; but I have seen my own troubles, for all that, and many a sore grief of other folk's; and bits of small hardships, and discontents, like what thoughtless bairns make their moan

about—truly, it is my desire the like of these things should be seen and looked upon in a true way—being nothing but the clouds of the morning, and little like to the storms and the tempests of the mid-day, or the sore shadow that falls in the night.

Now, truly, folk may think that the like of this converse, though I had it with Rhoda, has small ado in this place, and is no for edification, seeing I have little skill in the way of argument, and my brother Claud, the minister, could have settled the matter far better than me; but I think the less of this, seeing that every person has their ain freedom to pass by a page here and there, as their own pleasure is; which, when I am reading books, I many a time do myself.

Now, I would very fain Rhoda had

gone with me to some more places I was minded to tarry at; but when I came to Isabel Melville's door, the bairn would not enter in, though I bade her come with me.

"I cannot bear any more—I cannot, indeed," said Rhoda. "A battle may be very fine to look at, but I do not like to see the wounded. No—you are good—you are helping the people; but I am not good, and I am of no use, and I had rather go home. It is better fun quarrelling with Jenny than with you. I will go home."

So I behoved to let her go home, as she said; and truly, the like of this house was no in Rhoda's way, or I would have been well-pleased for her to see it, such a picture as it was. Isabel was a woman winning up in years, but still in

her strength, and maybe as much as fifteen years younger than the like of me; and having been a very discreet and thrifty lass in her young days, and ever in good places, and getting big wages, had saved siller, and set up a house of her own the time I was away. Truly, it was little casement to her—for what she did it for, was to take home her brother's orphan family, and enter into the charge of them, seeing they had neither father nor mother, nor a near friend but herself in this world. There were three bits of things, girls, and one wild callant, twelve years old, that was more fash to Isabel than all the rest put together; but it was just a comfort to see the way this honest woman was training up the three bits of lassies, to win their own bread in a creditable way, and bring comfort—in their own place—to whatever

house they might be in. For herself, she could turn her hand to anything, and was as eident a woman as could be found in the countryside, and maintained the four bairns as wiselike as bairns could be. Also, her bit small house was just a picture to look at, and content, and peace, and the fear of God was in it. She had wrestled with the world in her day, this decent woman; but Rhoda would have seen no wounding here.

My own errand with Isabel did not take long; for it was mostly to ask after the bereaved woman, who had lost her man in this accident, and who was a near neighbour here—for I likit not to go this day to the house of trouble myself, to put the widow-woman about in her first grief. There was a great family of them, poor fatherless bairns! and the mother but a

weakly, handless body, sorely held down by so many little things, and a very unlike person to labour for them. So Isabel and me made a paction that I would be at some needful charges, and she would ease the poor woman, so far as might be, at this season, of the fash of these bairns; also, I trysted with her, to come again the morn, and see after them myself.

So I took my way to Sunnyside in the gloaming, which was winterly, yet no without a look of spring. The stars were shining out, one at a time, in the sky, and the lights were lighted in Burrowstoun as I went by up the brae to my own door; and much meditation I had in my own mind, which I need not to set down here. But truly, I marvelled within myself, when I won to my own house, to find Rhoda waiting for me at the door, and the room

made as bright within as it could be, and my chair set in its place, and everything ready to my hand. Doubtless, she was but an ill bairn; but, for all that, the silly thing had ways with her, when she likit, that wan to folks' hearts.

CHAPTER IV.

Now after this, for two or three days, I was taken up most of my time about the poor widow woman, and the suffering folk that had been in the accident at the Blackscaur; and, truly, it was a marvel, as well as a grief to me, to see how every harm in the whole countryside came to be blamed upon Mr. Allan, though, doubtless, whatever his faults might be, the poor lad was innocent of this. The Blackscaur was a great quarry, and was upon Mr. Allan's land, but

he had not siller to work it right, and the most part of it lay idle; and this special place where the accident had been, should have had more supports, or things of that kind—though I ken not the right description of them—and what did the folk do, but raise a new complaint upon Mr. Allan, for putting the lads' lives in danger by reason of leaving this place out of repair—which, truly, was very ill done of them, being country neighbours, that should have had a better thought—but many a sore heart it gave me to see the way they spoke. Now it may well be thought that I had a great handful at this season; for, in my judgment, the more it was blamed upon Mr. Allan—being a near friend to him by means of my niece Mary, and him being away himself, and for the credit of the family—the more it behoved me to do. And I will

not say but I was put to great charges, besides much fash and trouble, in this matter, and had but little space at that time for my own concerns.

Wherefore it came to pass that I had small converse with Rhoda upon that matter. Truly, I sought it not, for I was but an ill hand to justify the ways of the Lord to a thoughtless bairn like this, and it did but anger me in my own spirit; and seeing I had never kent of the like doubts within myself, I had not the skill to answer them as another person might have had. So I forbore to make any speech upon this matter myself, and left it to the operation of the Word, the which we read in our exercise, as was meet, morning and night, to work right thoughts in the mind of this bairn. Wherefore, I did not concern myself, but did my own turns, and went upon my way.

Now the widow woman, as I have said, was but a handless person, and had little skill to maintain her bairns; but it was a good Providence for her, that her father and mother, aged folk, were dwelling in Burrowstoun, keeping a bit small shop, and doing well in their small way—to whom she returned back, in the course of nature, with her youngest bairn, that was but an infant in her arms, and also her oldest girl, who was come some length, and could work about the house, and keep things right for the old folk. The two big laddies, they got herds' places with farmers in the neighbourhood, and little Betsey, she went to her uncle's at Sedgie Burn, and I gave the mother a small stipend for the keeping of the bits of twins myself—which, truly, was a settlement of their concerns, though to put the bits of bairns in their needful mourning for their father, was

also a thing that behoved to be lookit to; but that was little expense, seeing the like of them need not much in the way of dress. Then there were other families, where the men had gotten hurts, and needed help; though Lilly, who had the sorest handful of all, and Robbie, that was most afflicted, being very well-doing young folk, and no without their ain pride, would take nothing at my hand, saving it may be a sabbath day's dinner for the no weel lad, which Jenny was skilled to make, and the bairn Rhoda carried till him with her own hands. Also, I am very thankful to say, Robbie did well, and mended every day, which was a great comfort to me.

Now all this time—though I never let on I noted her—I could not but see the bairn Rhoda what her manner was. She would call in at Robbie Carr's of her own hand,

when I was doing other things, to bring word how he was; and if any errand was wanted to the town for any of these poor folk, she would be forth, and away doing it, before even I kenned. Also, she ruined whole three yards of good bombazine, that was to make part of little Betsy's black frock, to save me the trouble of it—which was very well-meant of the bairn—though, truly, it was not like that she could have the needful skill to make a frock for a little thing like Betsy, specially in cutting out the body, which, doubtless, was a fash to my own very self. And Rhoda never questioned at me any more about the troubles and the burdens of this world, nor made a lamentation about her own—though I saw well it was not because they were out of her mind, for many a long pondering she took sitting at the window of Sunnyside, looking down the brae,

where, doubtless, the bairn saw in her own mind one person upon the road, that had not come here for many a day. I will not say but I was very well pleased with Rhoda in divers ways, at this season—and a bairn of my own could not have been more thoughtful of me.

And so the spring grew upon us, or ever we were aware. We lived in a most quiet manner at Sunnyside, having few folk coming or going, except the bairns from Lilliesleaf, and the young thing Violet Primrose, that was great friends with Rhoda. They were as unlike each other as two young women-bairns could be; but Rhoda had no other company, and, doubtless, the two had more kindred in their thoughts, being both so young, than could be found with the like of me, and Violet was very pleased and proud, poor thing, to be reckoned the young lady's friend;

and many a long wandering they had their lane in my garden, and took much counsel together, though what the wiser they were for it, truly, I will not undertake to say. But I was very glad to see Rhoda so well pleased; and, for the other bairn, I took a great notion of her, seeing she was a very well-conditioned young thing, and of a pleasant spirit. She had her bits of trials, too, as I heard from Rhoda; but being in her natural place, and kenning well what she had to look for in this world, and minting at nothing higher, she was far better off than the other poor bairn, who lookit for many a thing as a necessity that Violet Primrose wist not of. And Rhoda forbye could not turn her hand to the common work of this life as Violet could; and what was worse than that, neither could Mr. Bernard, though he minted at no less than the care of a family. Poor

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

things! Many a heavy thought did these two young folk, that neither could fend for themselves, nor had friends to fend for them, give to me.

For aye the letters that came from the young lad were full of heaviness, and bitterness of spirit; and aye he was waiting upon somebody that never fulfilled his hope, or else was planning wild plans that never could be made anything of, and devouring his own spirit with repinings at his ill-fate. Also, it troubled me, many a time, to think how he could be living, seeing London was a very dear place to dwell in, as I have ever heard, and he was doing nothing for his own bread, and never had any siller to the fore, so far as I had been told, which made me troubled in my mind concerning the lad; though I think not—being but a bairn, and little experienced in this world—that Rhoda

ever thought upon the like of that, or had any fears in her spirit for the lad himself.

And I had little content in Mary's letters at this time. They were very hasty written, and small, and no like herself; in the which Mary, my sister, being greatly troubled concerning it, was full in the thought with me. The bairn made mention of many grand festivities, doubtless, and great folk; but what were they to the like of us, that were only minding upon herself, and wearying for her, and trembling, in our own spirits, lest our bairn should be led away? I was not pleased myself, nor without fear; but I was not so troubled as Mary, my sister—and truly, I always minded my promise, and took the bairn's part, and upheld her cause that she was doing well; though I will not say but I was sore grieved at their long tarrying

in that strange place, and at the sore neglect that was to be seen upon the lands at home, and trees cutting down, and things wanted in the very house. The bairns even were turning wild, so long away from their mamma, and nothing was right, so as to please a thoughtful person, or one that wished well to the house, about Lilliesleaf; and it was now the prime of May, the sweetest weather in the whole year, and still Mary and Mr. Allan abode away in the far away town, and never so much as let us ken, when they were coming home.

CHAPTER V.

Now, it was the month of May, as I have said, and very pleasant and seasonable weather; grand for the young corn, and also for the fruit, and sweet to the eye of man. I scarce mind a summer-time all my days, in which I was going about so constantly; for Rhoda would never let me bide still for three days at time, but was ever making up some bit travel, seeing it was a change to her, poor thing, and it was hard for her to put up with my quiet manner of life. So, with the bairns, and with Violet Primrose, that had

the charge of them, truly we were often upon the road, and Rhoda came to ken more about the notable places in the country-side, and the stories of them, than even I did myself.

Also, old Mrs. Elphinstone was greatly better in her health, which was a comfort to me, though ever making stories with Nancy Simpson, her woman, who carried them to the whole country-side, about the wastefulness of Mr. Allan and Mary; and how she looked for nothing less than to be turned away forth of Lilliesleaf in her old days. Cosmo, hearing tell these ill tales, got a very sore gloom upon his young brow, poor callant, and made long wanderings his lane, and would not come with us in our pleasure—and Mary, my sister, at the Manse, and even the minister himself, were sore grieved about the common report which

was over the whole country-side. I will not say but I was much perturbed in my mind as well; but truly—not to clear the young folk, who were doubtless to blame, —it is strange to see how much harm one ill tongue is able to do in this world.

It came to pass one fine morning, that I was sitting in my own parlour, by the window, making my meditation upon troublous things, and much taken up in my own spirit what was to come out of it all, and be the upshot of the matter, both to my niece, Mary, and to her little bairns. Rhoda was up the stair in her own room, looking out at the end window, —as I kent full well—to see the post come up the brae from Burrowstoun; for the bairn was aye most eager for tidings—and Nelly was sweeping out the door more purpose-like than common, and Jenny

crooning her bits of songs ben the house. It was a bonnie morning as heart could desire, and the leaves of the apple blossoms were falling white upon the grass, and the sweet smell of the hawthorn in the air. It came like a calm to me in my own thoughts—the look of this pleasant May day.

When the postman arrived at our door, and Rhoda came fleeing down the stair to get her letter—I never rose from my seat myself, being very little caring for letters, seeing there never was satisfaction in one of them; and, truly, I expected none this day. Therefore, it was a great surprise to me when Nelly came ben, carrying a letter in her apron, and bringing her dusty heather broom into the very parlour with her—the silly thing!—I took the paper, and gave the misfortunate bairn an admonition before I lookit at it, thinking it something

of little consequence; but, truly, I was much startled when Nelly went away, and I put on my spectacles, to look at the hand of write, to see it was Mr. Allan's hand.

I opened the letter very quick after that, being troubled. Wherefore should the lad write to me? And, truly, my trouble was none the less when I saw what it was about—for this was what Mr. Allan said:

"My dear Aunt,

"I have hesitated long as to the propriety of writing to you; but it is better to write to you, than to Mrs. Maitland, who, probably, would be more alarmed. I am very uneasy about Mary, whom my own bad example, I suppose, has injured. Certainly, I see no reason why my wife should be so much more virtuous than myself—but I have always tacitly expected it hitherto.

We are in a very bad and false position, Aunt Margaret. I am not ashamed to confess it to you. I have been abominably wrong myself; and Mary—though with the purest motives in the world, and only to please me, I believe—has been drawn into the same whirlpool, and lost her balance, like myself. I never knew my wife's gifts before; she is prettier, and more popular, and about as extravagant as any woman of fashion I see. But while other people admire, I only frown and grumble; and by and bye, unless we can make an end of it, we will ruin ourselves totally, and after the most approved fashion, and have no better resourse for our best days, than some cheap German town, debt, disgrace, and poverty. I do not blame Mary—I blame only myself, and the absurd folly which could find pleasure in this life. Now, I no

longer can find pleasure in it, but am bound in its fetters. What do you say, Aunt Margaret—will you undertake a journey to London, like a chivalrous old lady as you are, and bring back my poor Mary's mind to thoughts of home? I neither can nor will press this necessity on her, myself—not, at least, till the last extremity. But you could do what is impossible for me. Have some business, or make some, and come to our aid. Do not write, nor think it necessary to warn us beforehand; and put me in your debt for ever.

"ALLAN ELPHINSTONE."

Now, it may very well be thought, what a great flutter of my spirits this letter put me in. Me! Bless me! what could I do, travelling a great journey, all the way to London, a place I had never been in all my

days? I rose up from my seat, and took my travel about the room, being in great perturbation. What could I do with my own house, and Rhoda, that was a great charge upon my hands? and truly, what could I do, when I was there?—for, if Mary would not hearken to her own right thoughts, I had but small reason to think she would listen to me.

I abode in this spirit for, maybe, the space of an hour, much troubled, and seeing not what to do—but, seeing I sought counsel where it is aye to be found, by the end of that time, I came to a paction with myself. Wherefore, I cried upon Jenny to come to me; and sent her down to the inn, to get a gig, and a callant to drive me to the Manse; and with that, I dressed myself and put the letter in my pocket, and made ready to go—for, though it would grieve my

sister Mary, truly, she was the bairn's own mother, and had the best right to ken; and I concluded with myself, that it would be very ill-done of me, to take any step in this matter, out of their kenning who were most concerned. When I went to my own room, I saw Rhoda in her chamber, and that she had been greeting, poor bairn! and the tears were still in her e'en; and with that, she came and leaned her head upon me, and said something about "poor Austin!" from the which I divined that the lad was but in a poor way, and no grand fortune had come till him still. But I had to go away, bidding her take good care of herself, till I came back. Truly, among mortal folk, there are nothing but troubles on every hand.

We went very quick upon the road as I desired—and still this fair day was a pleasure

to see, and the bright light lying like gold upon the fields. Truly, my heart was moved when I looked upon the labouring folk, at their honest work, with the blessing of God upon the toil of their hands—and my heart was lifted up within me, craving of Him that moves the hearts of men at his pleasure to move the kindly heart of Mr. Allan, and bring my Mary hame, without harm, to her ain place.

Now when I came to the Manse, I gave them a surprise as might be thought, and Mary, my sister, fell into grievous trouble when she had read my letter, though she could not but reflect sore upon Mr. Allan, saying he was no blate to blame her bairn, and that if Mary was led away, it was but to pleasure him, and he had the wyte of it all—which, doubtless, was very true, though it was but small comfort at this

present time. So we all went into the minister's study—Claud, my brother, and Mary, and me—and took counsel together there.

"But truly, Mary," said I, taking comfort from a thought in my own mind, "it is my belief that this was ever what the bairn minted at, and that the sight of this letter would let her ken her time was come; for I think nothing but that it was for this one purpose—to weary Mr. Allan with his thoughtless ways, and to fear him well for the upshot of them, that Mary ever took this matter in her hand."

"I do not understand it, Margaret," said Mary, my sister, wiping the tears from her e'en. "Mary should have stayed at home, and then she could have borne no blame, and would have had the support of her friends whatever happened; but to think

of him finding fault with her for whom she has done so much. It is very hard to bear."

"Mary is of a generous spirit," said I, "it was to save Mr. Allan from destruction, and no to save herself from a false report; but truly, you two have the best right to judge. Am I to go?"

"Yes—yes—immediately!" said Mary, and "Yes, Margaret," said the minister, my brother, who had spoken very little all this time. 'Send Rhoda here, and start to-morrow; you cannot go too soon. If you are right," said Claud, with a kindling upon his face, though he was an aged man, "Mary has been a hero, and deserves honour from us all; and I believe you are right, and all will be well with our bairn. Let her know she may depend on us to the utmost of all we have, Margaret. Claud's little Maggie

needs nothing from us, and Cosmo will be best served by helping his mother. Yes—yes, go to-morrow. I will come and see you away—and Mary, dry your eyes, and send your message to her ;—no—it was a delusion of Satan—our Mary will never forsake the right way."

We had much more converse—but seeing it was all upon this one subject, truly, it is not to be thought there was much in it that was different from this; for where folk's hearts are in a matter, as ours were, it oft happens that they say the same words over and over again. It was gloaming before I went away, and very lothe they were to let me go then, and I would fain have tarried but for the thought of Rhoda; truly, poor bairn, she likewise had her troubles, and I could not leave her a whole night her lane in Sunnyside.

CHAPTER VI.

But I was not done nor near-hand done with my troubles that day, though I lookit to get a rest and some comfort when I won home, and a space to myself to gather up my thoughts, and make ready for my journey; but that was not to be. When I entered in at my own door, I saw Rhoda sitting in the dark at the window, though truly it was not common for a bairn of her impatient nature to abide so long quiet, being her lane; for it was mostly her way to get the candles ben, before the daylight was out, and when there

was small need of them, as I thought. When I went in beside her with a light, the bairn was started, like as out of a meditation, and her face was dark and heavy with many thoughts. Also, upon the table there was a letter lying, and I saw when I lookit at it, that it was from my Grace to me.

So I sat down upon my own chair, not tarrying to take off my bonnet, and opened the letter. Truly, it was another surprise to me, and far from a pleasant one, as it will be easy to see when I write it all down here.

"I have to commit to you a painful office, dear Aunt Margaret," said Grace, in her letter, "and troubled as you have been with Rhoda already, I should be afraid to tax any one but you with this additional burden; but she cannot have been your companion so long without learning something; and I hope she

will bear her grief more becomingly than she might have done six months ago. Aunt Margaret, my father is dead. The news of this has had more effect even upon myself than I could have supposed; and I do not doubt it will be a very violent blow to Rhoda, whom he loved after his fashion. I am very sorry for her, and for you, who must bear the first shock of her grief. Will you bring her home at once, my dear aunt? It would be hard to tell you how great a void your absence makes in Oakenshaw; and if you will, or could, bring Rhoda home without telling her, it might be less a burden upon you, and I could undertake it myself. But, in any circumstances, I beg of you, come home.

"He died suddenly, by an accident. I have scarcely ascertained how; and I enclose a letter from Mrs. Lennox, which is the only intimation I have had. Do not show it to

Rhoda; for it is harsh and unkindly. Poor little girl! she is nothing but an encumbrance in the eyes of these people; but I think in her circumstances, by-and-bye, when her first grief is over, it may be possible to bring comfort out of this misfortune. But it would only be an aggravation to speak of common affairs to poor Rhoda now.

"Mary writes me, frequently, though she does not admit me much to her confidence. But do not let our mother at Pasturelands suppose that Mary is 'led away.' I am quite sure she is not so; and, though *we* do not know what she is working at, she knows it herself.

"There will be many things to do in consequence of my father's death, Aunt Margaret. Perhaps I might have tried to be a better friend to him, small as was the bond of natural affection between us. He was

still my father; and I am pricked in my conscience now. But I feel more entirely my responsibility in respect to Rhoda, and Claud consents heartily. She at least shall be provided for. Come home, my dear aunt; I beg of you, come home."

Now truly it may well be supposed that the like of this letter coming at such a time put me into a great perturbation, so much that I let fall the other letter from Mrs. Lennox upon the table, where it lay spread out, with its broad, black border close to the light, and me taking no note of it. Few folk can see the like of that sign of mourning, and no have it in their minds to ask who has passed away; and Rhoda had come nigh to me, and doubtless glanced had upon it, and perceived that it was a hand of write she kenned; for truly the first thing that brought me to myself, was

a cry from her, and when I lookit up, there she was standing on the other side of the table, with her face as white as death, and her e'en, without a tear in them, fixed full upon me, and her aunt's letter grippit firm in her hand. The look of the bairn was fearsome to me. I rose to my feet, and drew near unto her, but she waved me away with her other hand.

"It is a lie—I know it is a lie—I am sure of it. She always hated me," cried out the poor bairn. "It is not my father—my father! Oh God! Oh God! Let me go away, and find out the truth!"

I tried to say a word, but she would not hear me; and when I stoppit her going forth of the door, she struggled with me in a furious wild way, as if she neither saw me, nor the airt she was going. Poor bairn—poor bairn! And I could do nought but

stand by and look on at a wild spirit that never had learned how to bow, fighting with God. Truly, it was a sore sight as ever I saw; for the stroke had fallen, and the thing was done, and the poor bairn, in her blind resisting way, was but dashing her head against a rock. It was a lie—it was a lie! it was all because the lady hated *her*, she said within herself; but well I saw all the time that it was because she kent it for true in her own spirit, that she denied it like this.

And after a space I brought her close to my own self, and reasoned with her, and telled her all that Grace, her sister, said. She hearkened to me, poor bairn, in a kind of sullen way, and heard me as if she heard me not; but, for all that, she sat still and listened—and that was so far well; and then, when I was near done, she started up

from my side, and went forth of the room, and up the stair, fleeing like the wind. Truly, I marvelled not that she sought to be her lane, but I was feared for her passing out without my knowing, and aye keeped my eye upon the door, sitting there steadfast watching and listening for her, lest she should steal forth of her chamber. The house was very quiet, seeing it was late at night, and I heard no sound but the clock in the kitchen, and the click of Jenny's wires as she worked her stocking, with whiles a word to Nelly, who was making her new aprons by the table, as I could see through the open door. Then I heard a foot pacing up and down in Rhoda's room, and then that was silent and no a sound could I hear coming down the stair. So I settld in my own spirit, that the bairn had overcome her first wild purpose, and was wrestling with her sorrow as

she behoved to do; and, truly, I could not find it in my heart to disturb her, though I was wae for the poor desolate bairn. A great grief is no to be meddled with, nor touched with a stranger's hand. I sat my lane, hearkening if I could hear her foot, or her word, and craving of Him that has all consolation, that He would bring healing to this sore stroke; but I went not nigh to the poor young thing mysel, to fret her spirit in her first grief.

And, truly, I made the exercise very short that night, and went up the stair to my room, leaving it in Jenny's charge to fasten the doors, and carrying some wine in a glass in my hand, to make Rhoda drink it, and put her to her bed. The moon was shining full in to her bit small chamber, and I set down my light in my room, and took it not in beside her, to dazzle her e'en, or make a

show of her tears. She was sitting upon the floor at the window, leaning down her head into her hands, and no a word nor a sob came from her, that I could hear. And, truly, I will not say but what I was feared to go in upon her, kenning how wild and unsubdued the poor bairn's spirit was.

"Rhoda," said I, putting my hand cannily upon her head, and shedding back her hair, that was all hanging down over her brow. "Rhoda! do you no hear me, my poor bairn!"

She never made a motion till I was done speaking, and then, with a sudden start, she threw off my hand, and stood up before me on her feet in a moment, with her e'en glancing wild and dry, and no a tear in them.

"What do you want with me?" she cried, in her quick, passionate way. "I

ask nothing from you—I don't want to be pitied or taken care of—I dont care for anything in the world; everything is cruel, hard, dreadful — everything! I will not bear it. Why did not God kill me, too? I should have been thankful for that."

"My dear," said I, "it is hard to be thankful for a sore tribulation, like this that the Lord has sent; but I doubt not He will bring good out of it in His own time; and Rhoda, my bairn, there is nought in this world of so little profit as striving with God."

"Oh! go away—go away!" said Rhoda, sinking down again upon the floor, and making a gesture with her hands to me. "You don't understand me—you trouble me—you trouble me! and all these common words mean nothing to me."

Ay, truly, they were common words; and my heart rose within me, for a moment, to hear what she said; for the Lord sends but one consolation to the wise and to the foolish, and never makes a better offer to the cleverest or the grandest amongst us, than he does to common folk—which, truly, is far from an easy lesson to the carnal heart; and what could I, or any comforter, speak unto a trouble that is common to every mortal, but a common consolation? Woe's me! but I kent well, in my own heart what a mock words were, and how sorrow never can take comfort but at the very hand of God.

But mostly the whole of that night I abode in my own room, sitting up to keep my watch, though she thought not of it, upon this poor bairn. And the first thing that roused her out of her sullen quietness,

was the summer morning light coming glinting in at the window, as bright and as blythe as if no evil was in this weary world. When it came upon her head, the bairn lifted up her e'en, and gave a desolate, wistful look at it, and shivered like as with a chill wind. When I saw that, I came in to her, and lifted her up, and called her by her name. By this time, she was worn out, even by her ain passion, and submitted to me whatever I likit to do to her, like a wearied bairn. So I loosed off her dress, and made her take the wine, and laid her down in her bed, and before long, while I abode to watch her, the poor thing fell sound asleep; for she was but young, poor bairn! and both heart and frame of her were exhausted by her grief.

When I saw her sleeping, I went ben and lay down upon my own bed, though it

was good daylight, and I did not take off my own apparel, kenning how soon it behoved me to arise again. An aged woman like me is far different from youth; sleep would not come to my e'en when I called for it, being out of timeous hours; so I lay upon my bed, full of many thoughts, with the sun rising in the bonnie morning sky before my e'en, and every bird of the wood, as you might think, lilting and singing outbye among the trees. I could not go to London and to Oakenshaw at the same time, and my niece, Mary, was nearer my heart than even this bairn; but I trusted in the minister, my brother, that he would give me wise counsel, and it was aye a comfort to think how soon he would be here.

CHAPTER VII.

I WAS very blythe, as may well be supposed, a while after I had risen up from my wakeful bed mysel, and when Jenny was laying the breakfast in my parlour, for fear of Nelly making a noise, and wakening Rhoda (for truly, in my heart I was feared for her awakening, poor bairn! kenning well, by my ain knowledge, how that is mostly the sorest moment of all in a time of trouble) to see the minister, my brother, driving up the brae to Sunnyside. The

morning was as fair and sweet as eye could wish to see, and Claud was very particular about the time, for fear I should be late of starting upon my journey, seeing he kent of no second trouble to distract me, or divide my thoughts; but I had been so sore taken up the whole night bypast, that I had not even my bits of things packit, nor anything ready for travelling far away.

I was walking in my garden, to see if the fresh air would do me good, when I first espied the Manse gig, with the minister; and without thinking, though I had nothing on my head but my morning cap, I made haste to meet him before he came to the gate, and made him stop, the which Claud was surprised at, as he was like to be.

"I am very blythe you are come, Claud," said I, "for truly, I never was in

sorer perplexity, nor had more need of counsel. Whisht, Robbie! surely the pony might be turned round about without all that noise."

The which word made Robbie look at me as surprised as the minister, for I was far from being a fractious person, though I say it mysel.

"In perplexity!" said the minister, in an eager, hasty way; "are you not ready for your journey, Margaret? I thought you had quite made up your mind last night."

"And so I had, Claud," said I, "but truly, we are short-sighted folk, and ken not what an hour may bring forth; and, since then, I have been put into a sore strait, being but a mortal person, like other folk, and little able to travel two airts at the same time."

"What!" said the minister, in a voice of fear, "is there a double trouble? Something has happened at Oakenshaw?"

"No," said I, "not so—nothing so ill as that; but I got a letter from Grace last night, and Rhoda, poor bairn! will have to be taken home."

With that, I told him the whole story. Now, it is not to be thought that there could be much moan made between my brother Claud and me, concerning Mr. Maitland, the gentleman that was gone, who was one that we had kent only for an ill man, and knew nothing of in the way of friendship. But Claud was sore concerned for the sorrowful bairn, as I was myself, and also taken up about this new trouble, as being a means of keeping me back upon my journey; for doubtless, Mary, being his own, was foremost in his thoughts—so we went in at

the gate of Sunnyside, throng in a consultation what we were to do, and speaking low, that nothing might disturb the troublous rest of the bereaved bairn; for Claud was as tender as any woman-person concerning her rest and comfort, poor thing! seeing it had been his business all his days, in the service of the Master, to minister to the distressed, and he kent what trouble was.

"I may be selfish," said my brother—though, truly, I marvel who would have believed it, to look at him; "but I cannot help feeling that it is more important for you to go to London than to Oakenshaw. Poor Rhoda! I am very sorry for her; but even you, Margaret, are comparatively a stranger. Could not I take her home?"

"Poor, desolate, broken-hearted bairn! She is her lane in this cauld world," said I, and I could not help but put my hand to

my e'en, for the water came to them in spite of myself.

"Yes," said Claud, my brother, "but not alone either; for she has friends who will not forsake her, and the best of all friends Youth and Hope, not to speak of the Father of the fatherless. No! she is not alone in the world, though she may well think so in the first shock. I see clearly enough that you cannot go away immediately as I expected; but I will wait till she wakes, and propose to her to take her home. Mary might go herself if you thought that better; but Rhoda is a strange girl. Perhaps, she will keep up better without sympathy. Yes, Margaret, I will go with her myself."

"And that would, doubtless, clear my way, Claud," said I; "but, notwithstanding, it is a sore thing to leave a friendless bairn

her lane with her trouble—and she has ever opened her heart more to me than even to Grace, no to say that she has a wild manner of speech, and takes much patience to deal with her. No that I am feared for you; but woe's me for this distressed bairn!"

"I shall take good care of her, Margaret," said the minister; and, truly, Claud was very confident, kenning little about Rhoda's nature, nor the fashious charge she was, at the best time. But, truly, it was not in my power to choose, and I was fain to be content.

So, with that, we went into the house—and then Claud began to reckon when I could get away, and to question me if I would be feared, or if it would trouble me to travel by night. I said "no," but I was far from sure in my own mind, seeing that

I could do little service to Mary if I were winning to London no weel, with the want of natural rest; for I was an aged woman, and could not forget my ain infirmities, as whiles could be done by other folk.

Now, truly, though the breakfast came straightway upon the table, I had little heart to take more than my cup of tea, and as soon as I could leave Claud, I steppit quietly up the stair to see if Rhoda was still sleeping. She had stirred in her sleep since I left her, and one arm was thrust out under the coverlet, as far as it could stretch, and her hand clenched tight; but still she was sleeping, and with her white face, and her dark hair drooping upon her brow, her long eyelashes, and the deep shadow about her close-shut e'en, she was more like my bairn Grace

than ever I had seen her look, and my heart yearned to her in her grief. She *had* friends—that was true—for she had my Grace, that never would desert one that was in trouble, and she had the lad Austin Bernard, the chosen of her youth. But alass, and woe is me! she had not one near hand that had kent her for the space of a twelvemonth, or loved her with the love of kindred and close blood. We might be kind in our fashion, but we were fremd folk, and, poor bairn! poor bairn! Rhoda was her lane.

When I was standing, pondering in my mind near by her bed, the bairn grew restless under my look, and moved about upon her pillow, and syne woke. When she opened her e'en, she lookit full at me, first wondering, and then remembrance came to her mind, and she gave a dreary, desperate look about

the room, and then started up with her black, knitted brow, in her bitterness and despair, trying to harden her heart. I drew near to her; and she tried to push me away; but I was no to be put away, and only drew the closer, and took the poor thing into my arms, and lifted up my voice mysel, being moved and troubled, and wept tears. I meant it not; but truly I could not refrain; and when she saw it in me, the bairn's defences were broken down in a moment. I never saw the like in all my days; but though it feared me, I was blythe of it in a measure, and thankful to see her get that relief to her heart. She grippit to me close, and clung to me as never bairn clung before; and her weeping was like a torrent of the hills, violent, and strong, and full of passion. I did not speak a word of comfort myself; I only put my hand upon her head, and called her by her name, and

prayed the Lord to bless and keep her. And truly this outgate was of His own sending; and the bairn's misery was calmed and soothed by it, the which was a wonderfu help and consolation to me.

When that was past, Rhoda rose off her bed, in her hasty way, and lookit at me again, trying to be steady and firm, though her bit young frame was trembling. "I must go away at once—indeed I must; and if you are kind, you will not try to stop me," she said. "I can travel alone very well; no one will harm me; and I must go to papa—I must. You need not look at me so—I have made up my mind."

"My dear bairn!" said I.

"You think I have forgotten," cried Rhoda, interrupting me before I could say another word: and to tell the truth, I did think the poor thing was confused in her

spirit, and did not mind what word had come last night. "I have not forgotten; but I will not believe till I see myself; and even now—even now—I might do something for him. If it is all true even, I might still do something for him," said Rhoda, pulling down her travelling gown out of the press, and putting it on so quick, that to look at her made me dizzy—and her voice was as fast as her hands, though it trembled more; "for I have nobody else in the world; and I love papa, though you all hate him. I know you all hate him in your hearts, and think he is not good; but he is mine, and I care for no one else in the world—no one else. Everything is cruel, both heaven and earth. You have sent Austin away—you did it—and papa! papa! But I do not care," said the poor bairn, turning round upon me, with a wild fire dancing in her e'en, and keeping down her

tears "Now I am quite alone. I neither want to weep, nor to be pitied; and I can protect myself. Good bye! I am going away."

"My dear," said I, "you are not going away. I am not going to strive with you, Rhoda Maitland, in especial, not now, when you are in sore trouble; but I will not suffer you to go away, for all you defy me like this. Now listen to me, my bairn. I will let you go to Oakenshaw, to your sister, who has the right news, and my brother, the minister—who, being mostly a stranger, will take care of you, poor bairn! and no fash you with speech—is down the stair even at this moment, and can soon make ready to convey you hame. I ken you are in great grief, my dear, and I count not what ill-considered words you may say in your trouble—but thrust not kindness away from you, Rhoda; for truly, after love and kindred, it is the best thing, and comfort

will come. My dear, are you hearing me? Or if you would rather choose it, Rhoda, I will even put off my own business, and take you home to Grace mysel."

"No, no, no, I will go with your brother," Rhoda cried out, being subdued to reason, in a measure, "He will not speak to me—he will leave me alone. Yes! I know you are very kind," she said, looking up for a moment, as if she did not ken whether to put me away from her, or to flee into my arms again (for there was little moderateness in the poor bairn); "I know you are; and I do not deserve it. But I don't want kindness —I cannot bear it now. Only let me alone."

Which, truly, was what I did, seeing she sat down in the window, with her cloak and bonnet on, and sat brooding upon her grief, and turned her face from me straightway.

But it was sore against my heart to leave her so, though, maybe, for a bairn of her spirit, it was the best thing. Na, I could not do it. When I had gotten down the stair, beside Claud my brother, I behoved to go back again, to take her some tea, and made a dozen errands up and down, before the hour was done; though I well believe I only fashed the bairn, and wearied, but did not satisfy myself—seeing she never lifted her face to me, and whiles spoke a hasty word, and I was little fit, after being up the whole night, for pacing up and down the stair. But we made up our minds, Claud and me, that he would drive her up to the Manse, to get a change of apparel for himself, and let Mary, my sister, ken; and that syne this very day, without delay, he would take Rhoda home. When the gig came to the door, the bairn came down, ready to go,

with a big black veil close over her face; and though I kissed her bit white cheek through the veil, she scarce spoke a word. And so, having watched Claud and her away, I put up my ain things, and set my face to my travel, myself.

CHAPTER VIII.

By the time I had put up such things as I needed—being but a very small providing, seeing I counted on staying but a short time in London—and given Jenny bits of needful directions, what she was to do while I was away—it was the hour for the railway; and I had to hurry down myself, and take out my own place, which was a great trouble to me, seeing I had ever had somebody, either Claud, my nephew, or the minister, my brother, or Grace, or Mr. Allan,

to take that fash off my hands, until now; and truly, but for Rhoda and her trouble, the minister's chief errand to Sunnyside this morning, was just to see me away. But that was easy done, seeing I was well kent about the place, and the folk were all blythe to do me a good turn. And so I got away. I am aye much put about with a long travel, myself, specially upon the railway, being a thing I have been little used to; and this day, being much taken up, in my own mind, both about Rhoda, and her unruled spirit, poor bairn! and also, concerning Mary, my niece, and how things would be when I wan to London, it is no to be thought I had much comfort of my journey, though I was travelling in the dearest way. Truly, though the fastness of the thing is just a wonder to behold, the noise, and the stour, and the endless clatter, no to speak of the fearsome

skreigh every now and then, were very trying to me; and though, doubtless, it behoves Christian folk to consider that the same hand of Providence is great and mighty, as well in the bowels of the earth, as in the daylight of the plain countryside, yet I will not say that I ever was whirled through one of the black fearsome arches that folk call tunnels, without a great drither and a tremor at my heart. Also, there was more fash in this travel, than in any I had ever gone before, seeing, for one thing, it was a far longer journey, and I had to stay a night at a strange place in the middle of it, and to put up at an inn, among unkent folk, which was a sore experience for a single gentlewoman, travelling her lane, and come to my years—though I will not say but everybody was very civil, and even the English servants about the inn where I

abode, when once they understood my speech, were very well-bred, and did what I bade them, and gave me little trouble. I took the road again very early in the morning, and got to London by the middle of the day; and truly, I will ever count it for a great providence, that I did not lose both myself and my belongings; but got, at last, into a noddy—and a very dirty noddy it was, that I would have thought shame to be seen in, if it had not been a strange place, where no person kent me. By this time, I was in a great tremor, marvelling concerning Mary—and before I kent where I was, we had stoppit at her door.

It was not to call a grand house, in any way—at least, no to look upon it from without; but it was very near a very big park, full of trees and green grass, that was a pleasure to see, with a water in it,

giving bits of glints and sparkles in the sun, beneath the branches. The door was opened by a man in a livery; and to see his look, it was plain enough that he thought but little of me and my noddy, though he could not refuse to let me in; but very cauldrife it was to me, to light down at the door of that strange place, and no one kent face to say welcome to me, and the strange man—though he was but a flunkey—no very sure about letting my bit trunk come into the house, and giving many looks at my quiet apparel, as if he kent not what to think of me. With a heavy heart, I went up the stair, and into a back chamber, which opened into another, and another, fine rooms—though little like the rooms at Lilliesleaf; and then I waited but a small space, when the door opened, and Mary lookit in, in a dubious way. But, to see the bairn's face,

when she found out it was me! Truly, I will not say but that was hire enough for the whole gate to London, weary as it was.

"Aunt!" she cried out—and for the moment I could not but think she was a bairn again in the fullness of her joy. Now we had aye thought much of Mary's looks, seeing she was a very bonnie young thing in her young days, and had a most sweet face at every time; but I never thought to have seen any bairn of ours looking as she did now. It might be the dress for one thing—or maybe the company and the kind of life she was in, helpit it on—but Mary was as near beautiful as ever I saw, which was a great surprise to me.

"When did you come?—how did you come?—what induced you, aunt?" cried Mary, "and the bairns—the bairns? nothing

has happened at Lilliesleaf?—but I can see that in your face."

"No, my dear," said I, "they are all well, blessings on them! nothing has happened at Lilliesleaf; but, truly, I came hither all the road ance-errand to seek my ain strayed bairn, and to see if she had clean forgotten which was the way home."

"No, indeed, Aunt Margaret," said Mary, "you need not fear that; the way home will be the pleasantest way in the world to me; and did you come to warn me, or to persuade me? Well, you must stay now till my work is quite done."

"And when will that be, Mary?" said I.

"Very soon now, I hope, aunt," said Mary, and she drew a chair close to my side, and sat down and took hold of my hand, "now, aunt, now—all about the bairns!"

And I telled her all about the bairns as was meet, and she sat and listened, aye holding my hand close, whiles with a smile and whiles with a tear, her heart shining in her e'en to hear tell of every one of them, and everything about them, as only the like of me would tell. Na—folk might say what they likit—but the heart of my Mary was as leal as ever it was to her ain house and home.

After a space, though I was not near done telling, nor Mary wearied of hearing me, she rose up from her seat:

"I am selfish, aunt; I forget your comfort," said Mary, drawing my hand through her arm, and leading me away—for I had not taken off my travelling things—and, truly, as we went by a great, big, grand mirror upon the wall, I could not but glance at her in it, looking so bonnie; she was to be kent

for a gentlewoman at her youngest and her humblest time—but to see her, what a look she had now!

So Mary led me away into a very grand little room, where the furnishing was beautiful to see. It opened off from her own chamber, and was called her dressing-room, and the table was just covered with bonnie bits of nicknacks that must have cost a great deal of siller. So there Mary set me down in a big easy chair, and sent away a maid that was in the room to get me some tea—seeing that is what I aye like coming off a journey—and took my bonnet and my shawl from me herself. Truly, I could not but give a wondering look at the room, and all that was in it; and there was a case open upon the table with grand jewels sparkling in the sun, and a grand gown covered with lace spread out upon a sofa, and everything round

about in the same fashion. It was just a marvel to see.

"Dear me, Mary," said I, "this is no like the bit small room at the Manse where my bairn used to be; but, my dear, though it is very bonnie, it must have cost much siller—more than you could spare."

"Yes; a great deal more than we could spare, aunt," said Mary, in a very quiet way, "on the contrary, we have not spared anything since we came here."

And with that the bairn began to show me one thing after another; bits of useless bonnie things that were fit enough for folk that had much means, and kent no better than to throw their fortune away; but Mary thought no shame—though, truly, it went to my heart to see all this wastry, and to think upon the good lands lying waste, and

so many a wiselike place falling to decay at home. I was surprised at Mary; she let me see everything with a grave face, as she might have let me see the books, or the lessons that some person was learning wisdom by. But she never took it amiss, when I held up my hands at them, and said, were they no great wastry? but only smiled in her quiet way, and made answer to me: "Great wastry, aunt."

So truly, I did not ken what to say to her, and was fain to go back to my story about the bairns, which was pleasant to both her and me, and then the tray came with my tea, the which I was thankful of, and when I was taking it, and Mary sitting by, sewing at something—for she had not altogether forgotten her old ways—and aye asking the other question about Lilliesleaf, I just tried to keep my e'en away from the

rest, as far as I could, and to keep ill thoughts out of my mind; for, though I could not but think she was far to blame, there was no change, in either heart or spirit, that I could see upon my bairn.

I had, maybe, been as much as two hours safely landed there, when we heard a step coming to the door.

"There is Allan; how much astonished he will be," said Mary, rising up very quick to meet him; but truly, my trouble was, that he would be but very little surprised, and was sure to let her ken the secret of wherefore I came here.

And so, indeed, it came to pass—for we were ill actors, both him and me—and though he tried to put on a wondering look, it was not such as could deceive any person, and his kindly face grew red to

the very brow, and he kent not well what to say, except that he was blythe to see me there; and I think not I was much better myself. All this time, Mary was looking at him and me, and well I kent, by the pawkie smile upon her face, that she read us both, and saw as clear as if I had telled her, what it was that brought me to London at this time.

Mr. Allan abode a long space, and we had very pleasant converse, speaking of home, which, I well saw, his heart was yearning to; and when he had to go away, he gave me a warning glance, and syne turned very red again, as he saw Mary's eye light upon him. Mary said not a word till after he was fairly away, and then, far from being angered, turned round upon me with her blythest smile.

"So you have been plotting, aunt," said

Mary, "plotting against me! and Allan sent for you—I know very well you will not deny it, Aunt Margaret! I could not have supposed this of you."

"Truly, Mary," said I, "it was not my blame."

Mary had gone to the window to look out after him, for they were very fond about one another, the two of them, though they were old married folk, and when she came back to me, her e'en were even glistening, so that I kent not whether it was most with smiles or tears.

"And Allan sent for you, aunt?" said Mary, over again, as if, instead of being angry at hearing that, it was news that was nigh being too much joy. "Allan has begun to plot against *me*, in his turn. Oh! Aunt Margaret, be thankful for me! for I have done my work at last."

With that, she sat down beside me, and leaned down her head on my knee; and whether the bairn was overcome with tears, or with blytheness, or was giving thanks in her heart, I will not take upon me to say; but this I ken, that when she rose up, though her bonnie e'en were wet, her face was shining like the very light—and the look of Mary, my niece, was no like the look of one that had put peace or comfort to the hazard, for the sake of this world's pleasure, but was even like the shining countenance of a bairn of God, that had been in to the depths seeking and saving a thoughtless man, and had brought him forth with songs and in peace.

CHAPTER IX.

The rest of this afternoon was spent in nothing but converse about home, and our ain folk; and Mary was concerned to hear of my trouble with Rhoda, as was natural, and much taken up about the bairn herself. Also, I made inquiry concerning the young lad, Mr. Bernard; but Mary kent not much about him, seeing he had soon stoppit coming to the house, she said, and had fallen into a melancholy way of thinking, by reason of nobody

helping him to a fortune, which I was vexed to hear. When it came to be late in the afternoon, maybe, between four and five o'clock, seeing I was well rested by that time, Mary made me to go out with her in a carriage, which, to my comfort, lookit plain and douce, and no so extravagant as most of the things she had, and in it we took a drive into the grand park I had seen, where many carriages and folk on horseback were throng in the road; no to speak of very bonnie bairns and decent folk that were to be seen on the green grass, and beneath the trees. Truly, it was a pleasant sight as could be, and much I marvelled to see the like of this in the great city, London, which is nothing but a ravening wilderness to the thoughts of many country folk, and where, it was my fancy, you would neither see green sod nor

pleasant trees from one end of the town to the other.

Also, Mary told me the names of many great folk that were driving on the same road with her and me, and many among them she kent herself, which was both a marvel and a pleasure to me. And so it came to pass, that with everything being so new and so strange, and my own mind far from clear concerning my bairn, not kenning if she should be blamed or praised, but in a great bewilderment about all the grandeur and the wastry of the house, I was very sore at a loss, and could scarce say a word of all the serious things I was disposed to say. Then we came home; and after the night was far spent, and I was thinking of going to my bed, seeing I was wearied with my travel, and the watching that went before, it may well be

thought what my marvel was, when Mary went away from me to dress, seeing she was going out at that time of night. I held my peace, being sore amazed. Truly, I could not trust my very e'en when I saw her coming ben again, as grand and as bonnie as a princess in one of the bairn's fairy tales. To think that this was our Mary, a bairn of the Manse, and come of a douce and sober kindred—and that the like of her, being, as I trusted, of a well-disposed and godly spirit, and a righteous person in all her ways, was going forth to the companies of pleasure and festivity, at ten of the clock, in this May night!

"Well, aunt," said Mary to me, with a smile, "ten o'clock is just as innocent as seven o'clock, though it would not quite do in Pasturelands." And with that, Mr. Allan, being very proud of his bonnie

wife, as I could well see, though a cloud was on his brow, put a mantle about her, and gave her his arm, and they went away. I never was left in the like bewilderment all my days. No that I reflected upon them for leaving me; for well I wot it was no lack of love or kindness. But, bless me, what order could there be in the house, or right rule any place, when the master and the mistress went forth upon their pleasures at ten of the clock, and did not come in again till all the hours of the night!

So I went to the chamber that had been sorted for me, and wherein there was routh of comfort, and everything that heart could desire for the ease of the outward frame, with heaviness upon my spirit, and aye craving sore to ken in my own mind where it would all end. To

think of the like of me, an aged woman that had little experience of the like of this, coming here to put in my hand, as if I could do ought! And to think of Mr. Allan, that should have kent better, asking me! Oh, Mary, Mary, my bairn! to think the vanities of this world could wile your heart away from your ain pleasant hame!

Now after that, it came to pass that the days went on, leaving me still marvelling, and with no change. And I could not see either that Mary had great heart to her pleasures; for it was aye when I was telling her of hame and of the bairns, that her eye shone, and her face lighted up. As for Mr. Allan, his brow grew darker every hour; but it was strange to me that he never had sought a word with me, nor said more concerning my coming. And just to abide

a guest and a sojourner in this house, and of no profit to any mortal, and to think of all the bits of bairns at Lilliesleaf, and Grace, with all the charge of Rhoda upon her, was very poor comfort to me. Mary would have me go with her every place I could go; and aye she had her festivities at night; and a very wearisome life it was, as I could well see, and a great marvel to see how she keepit her strength, and her bonnie looks, and her good spirit. Mr. Allan had his own ways and pleasures, doubtless, also. But after I had been a week there, I saw that a great gloom had come upon him; and he got an anxious, careworn look, and keepit constant in a small bit library down the stair. And I was very sore feared that it was him that had telled the man that opened the door to say a lee to somebody that came asking for Mr. Elphinstone, and to tell that he was no at home.

Now one morning, it came to pass that I went into this bit room myself, seeing I wanted to write a letter; and Mr. Allan was busy with books and papers on the table. He lookit up in an eager way when I came in, and lifted a chair for me to sit down. So I sat down, marvelling if he would speak now, which truly he did, after a time.

"Well, aunt, you do not find that I exaggerated?" said Mr. Allan, playing with a silver pen, in a restless way. "Here we are floating gaily down the stream; and now I suppose it is only a question of time. But, it is not so easy, after all, to make up one's mind to ruin."

"Dear me, Mr. Allan," said I, "are you sitting here, in this quiet manner, waiting for that?"

"Well, if I did not sit here, it might be

less tedious—it might come a little sooner," said Mr. Allan, rising up, and pacing up and down the small bit room. "But I am sick of it all, and worn out—that is the truth."

"And Mary is bringing it on? Do you mean to tell me that? Mary, my own bairn!" said I. And I could not but give a cry in my trouble to listen to such a word, even from my own mouth.

"No, no, Mary only finishes the business —only helps to finish the business," said the young man. "What fools we have been! Why, see there, aunt," and he lifted up a book, and threw it upon the table near hand me, giving me a great start, though he meant it not, "there is an absurd story all about green fields, and rural happiness; and I have been reading it—I!—though it is under the mark for a cockney boarding-school—and

actually sighing over an impossible Arcadia. Yes, experience is a terrible teacher; but I never thought to have learned so much at her hands."

"And, Mr. Allan," said I, "will you say to me that it is all through the means of Mary?—all the doings of my innocent bairn? But truly you cannot look for it that I should hear to the like of that?"

"I do not blame Mary," said Mr. Allan, seriously, coming back, and sitting down at the table. "She only shows me the extent of my folly—the full measure of what I have lost."

"Oh, Mr. Allan!" said I, "if you were back again in Lilliesleaf the morn, and no difference from what used to be, you would weary of your quiet life before a year was done."

The young man gave me a strange smile.

"I have very little hope of making the experiment," he said, in a dull, quiet tone; and truly, his manner was like a man that had put away good hope from him, and was waiting for whatever might come. I was grieved to my very heart, but also, I was far from pleased to see the like of this.

"And wherefore are you sitting still here?" said I. "I did your bidding, Mr. Allan, though I was much hindered upon my way, and was an aged person, and saw little good I could do; but wherefore do you not arise, and take your journey hame to your own place, and bring all the good you can out of this evil? To tarry till it comes, and never to lift a hand to keep it away, is ill work for a Christian man."

Mr. Allan gave a shrug to his shoulders,

and answered me not; but I could see, by the restless way he stirred upon his chair, that he kent not anything to answer to that.

"Yes, Mary has her share of the blame," he said, in a hasty manner, after a long space; "she has not left it all upon my head—she has her share."

"Truly," said I, "she was never careful all her days to keep herself safe, if other folk were in peril; and well I ken it was more in her heart to take the blame from you, than to flee from it hersel."

When I said that, Mr. Allan started, and lookit in my face for a moment, and syne he rose half to his feet, and syne fell back again into his chair.

"To take the blame from me!" he said, in a half-angered, half-wondering manner; and though he did not ask me a

question more, he lookit very eager in my face, and pondered what I said. Truly, I was feared in my own heart that Mary would not thank me, and maybe I had gone too far.

"Mr. Allan," said I, "I ken not Mary's meaning, nor her plan, but I ken her ways and her nature well, and I see she has little pleasure in this manner of life, and wearies sair for her bairns and her own house. Say you but the word, and I could well answer for Mary, she will be most blythe to come away."

"You exceed my comprehension now, I confess, Aunt Margaret," said Mr. Allan, with a thought of haughtiness in his tone; "but I will not discuss my wife, even with you. No, no; Mary is not so shadowy a person; she has her own individual will and inclination quite as strong as mine."

With that, I held my peace; for I neither would hear ill of my bairn, nor take her part with one that was more bound to her defence than even me; and I will not say but I was angered, forbye. He had taken his ain pleasure himself, with little thought whether she was pleased or no, and now he behoved to sit here in despair, because Mary had changed her manners to pleasure him—her that was a credit to every friend she had, and weel thought of, far and near! He was not blate to say the like of this to me!

CHAPTER X.

THE next day after that, Mary being otherwise taken up, I thought I would even venture to take a bit walk my lane, kenning I could not well lose my way the length of the park, where any person might have been pleased to walk, on a bonnie day like to this; and truly, I got that length without trouble, and took pleasure in it, seeing it was a bonnie sight to see both common folk and great folk, rejoicing in the light of heaven and the common air—the which

was sweet both to feel and see. Now, when I turned back again, to come home, I had worse fortune, and did not take the right turn, but strayed out of my way, and got into a bit small street, where I could find no outgate. When I was going along in a very perplexed manner, on the pavement, being far from sure where I was, and scarce liking to stop a strange person on the street, and ask the right road, it chanced that, looking up, my eye lighted upon a kent face. The lad went past me, or ever I could stop him; and truly, for the first moment, I minded not who he was; but when I was him passing on before me, and his step heavy and downcast, and his dress wearing bare, though aye like a gentleman, it soon was clear to me. Poor callant! it was easy to see he had been in adversity, and sore worn out with disappointment, and

tried with puirtith, which is ever sore to bear—for it was just Mr. Bernard, and no other. I went on after him, being well-pleased to fall in with him in this manner; and seeing he walked slow, I did not find it very hard to keep up with him, till suddenly the lad came to a pause, and stoppit at a door. So I went up to him, when I saw that. He lookit at me for a moment, turning very red; and then he came down off the steps, and said he was surprised to see me, and turned round quick, that I might not look upon the house—for it lookit but a small house, with bits of flower-pots in the window, and no like a gentleman's abiding-place. Poor callant! but he needed not to be feared, for showing his poverty to me.

So, I telled him I had come up to see my niece, Mary, and had lost my road;

and he turned with me, in a kindly manner, to put me right for home—but small inclination for any converse the young lad had showed, which was a marvel to me, seeing I had parted so short time from Rhoda; and now, I had to begin a speech about her myself.

"I have heard no word from Rhoda, Mr. Bernard," said I; "as, truly, it was not to be thought she could have the heart, in her first stroke of trouble, to write letters to me, or any fremd person; but I would like well to ken how she is, poor bairn! and if any more news of the calamity had come."

"You do not seem to know that we are sharers in this calamity, such as it is, Miss Maitland," said the young lad, in a quick way, as if it was a sore subject. "My brother and Rhoda's father were together, and together lost their lives."

"Dear me! Mr. Bernard, I am very sorry," said I—but he would not let me speak.

"My brother was scarcely my acquaintance," said Mr. Bernard, in a haughty way; "and I will not take credit for feeling which I make no pretensions to. We were early separated, and never had any friendship. Rhoda knew him better than I. She grieves sufficiently for us both."

Now, I could not miss but see the bitterness in the lad's tone—woe's me!—he had, doubtless, heard tell of the old liking that was between Rhoda and his brother, and was jealous of the buried man.

"Ay," said I, "we kent nought of what had happened to Mr. Bernard; but when the poor bairn heard of her father's end, she was even like to break her heart."

When I said that, the young man's face softened.

"Yes," he said, "she was desolate enough already. Poor Rhoda! poor child! but you will be kind to her, at least, whatever comes."

"It is my hope nothing more will come, but a kind bridegroom and a good home," said I, "when such things are seasonable, and the mourning is past. Na, Mr. Bernard, never you start and look away from me, for the nearest friend that Rhoda has to look to, is doubtless just yourself."

I heard a sound by my side, as if the lad was grinding his teeth in anger or in trouble, and with that I lookit up at him. His face was white and firm-set, and there was pain upon the callant's brow.

"And I am half a pauper, a useless, poor gentleman," he said, in a low, fierce voice, that sounded like a cry. "Look at me! she had need have better friends than I."

"You are a proud callant," said I, "and will, maybe, take a friendly question ill, or a word of counsel; but I maun even try. Are you doing nothing, Mr. Bernard? or what evil thing is it that makes you so hard in your speech this day?"

"Oh, yes! I am doing something—I am waiting—waiting," said the young man, "on a hundred hopeless chances; that is my occupation to-day, as it was yesterday, and six months ago—waiting! it has broken stronger hearts than mine."

"I would wait on nothing but Providence, if I were like to you," said I; "for

truly, it is my thought you have been wasting your strength on false hopes this many a day."

"Providence! you are allegorical, Miss Maitland," said Mr. Bernard, with a kind of fierce laugh. "My Lord and his Grace are tangible persons, when one can reach them; but if I went, cap in hand, to beg a small place from Providence, can you direct me to the proper quarter? My prospects do not look the brighter for this suggestion."

"Whisht, callant, and be not profane," said I, "though truly, I am not angry, for you ken no better. I make little doubt Providence will find you out and show you mercy, or ever you are aware; for the dealings of the Lord are no like the dealings of men. But will you tell me, for Rhoda's sake, if there is ought you are trying to do?"

"I will tell you anything for Rhoda's sake," said the lad, in an agitated way, as if I had won at his heart by that word. "Poor Rhoda! she, at least, cares what becomes of me. My brother, Miss Maitland"—and here the callant's tone changed to bitterness again—"My brother, from whom I never had either kindness or help all my life, left me, by right of kindred, his heir. Let me describe to you my inheritance. An old, broken-down manor-house in a remote county, in the first instance—and in the second, a heap of money, enough to make us rich, both Rhoda and me."

"Bless me!" said I, "and if it is so, wherefore do you make this moan to me?"

The young man gave another laugh, fierce and bitter.

"Do you remember the old fable of the gold that turned to bits of slate and stone?" he said; "it is more in your way than in mine. This money, Miss Maitland, had been won at the gaming table, and won unfairly, as I was told; so I did the only thing that a man of honour could do—I restored to the victim what could never belong to me. And so, having been mocked with one vain vision of prosperity—though, I confess, even then that I grudged to owe to my brother—here I am again, no better than before."

"Na," said I, "say not so; for you aye have the comfort of doing right, which is as great a pleasure as the Lord ever grants to man."

But the callant's lip curled with disdain.

"Yes," he said, "I have the delight of

receiving an effusion of gratitude, profuse and unmeaning, from the young fool who has had the benefit. Providence! do you call it Providence, to heap wealth upon a booby, and leave me a pauper? But I only shock you. Come, we will be done with this."

"My man," said I, "would it make you great amends if you got the siller, and the fool's understanding with the same? Would *you* niffer with him, you ungrateful callant? I wot well you would rather have your ain wit than his riches—though truly, I see little good it has done you, when you ken no better than to make a reproach upon Providence. But for all that, you have done well, and I am blythe of it, and it is more pleasure to me than if you had gotten great spoil."

But grieved I was to see that the lad him-

self thought not so. He had will to do what was right, being sore put to it; but the Lord had not seen fit to give to the callant the liberal soul which could rejoice in this, and he grudged the ill-gotten siller though he keepit it not. But it ill became the like of me, a sinful person, to sit judge upon his thoughts; he had done what was just, and that was all that mortal folk have a claim to look unto.

So Mr. Bernard went on with me, and we had much more converse; but the lad had an unsettled and troubled mind as ever I saw, and kent not what he would be at; for nothing would serve him but an occupation that was fit for a gentleman, as he called it, and, truly, it was hard to win at what that was—though the callant lookit in my face without a blush—me! come of a line of godly ministers, that had served in the Word for

the love of it, and been leal to the Master's cause in good report and in ill report—and made a reflection upon it that he could not "take orders," and win into the kirk —him! Truly, I am little learned in the ways of the English kirk, but I could not thole to think of the like of him serving in the courts of the Lord's house, even though I worshipped not in that manner myself; for, doubtless, it is but manners that differ, and them that seek His ways are of one heart in every place.

Notwithstanding I was ill content, both for his sake and for Rhoda's, to part with the callant again, and let him slip from me like a knotless thread, and I had sore work wiling him to come in with me when we came to Mary's door. But seeing I let him ken we were to abide very short space in London, he yielded to come in at last,

and gave me his word to come back again, and to let me ken when he heard from Rhoda. He had kent little kindness as I well believe since he came into this great and desert place, and at the last I thought the callant's heart was softened, in especial as Mary was very well pleased to see him, and would take no denial but that he would come to his dinner another day, which he gave consent to do, and so he went away. Truly, I have had my own troubles with bairns from time to time, but so bewildered as I was, and put to my wits end, with these two young things, Rhoda and Mr. Bernard, I never was all my days. They were not like our own bairns in any manner, and, to speak truth, I ken not who they were like, save one another, which was a great comfort, seeing they were troth-plighted, and were to travel the ways of

this world hand-in-hand; though whether they would 'gree the better for their likeness, being both of a wild and unsubdued nature, truly, at this time, I will not take it upon me to say.

CHAPTER XI.

When I told Mary of my falling in with Mr. Bernard, and that he was abiding nigh at hand, and also of the story he had told to me, she was very much taken up, and the lad got favour in her eyes. Also, Mr. Allan, when he heard it, thought much of him, though he was soon cast down himself, and had but little heart for other folk's troubles, being in a bewilderment concerning his own. But Mary was aye a greater marvel to me, the more I saw of her in her new estate; for

she neither faltered nor swerved upon her road so far as I could see; and though she kent all the wastry of the house, and how great expense everything was, truly I saw no sign in it that her spirit was disturbed, which made the more aggravation in Mr. Allan. But before I come back to the two—though it may well be thought, being my ain, they ever lie nearest to my heart—I will even tell out my tale about Mr. Bernard, an the good Providence that befel the lad, even in his coming to this house.

We had much converse among ourselves respecting him, as may well be thought, and touching Rhoda also, and how Grace would do with her, and if the two young things would cast in their lot together now, or wait for a better time. Truly, neither marrying nor giving in marriage was in Mr. Bernard's head; but that was nothing to the purpose;

for if Rhoda got a moderate provision of siller, I wist well that the bairn would be little content with it till she had gotten some right means to give share of it to Austin—seeing though they were both out-of-the-way bairns, and nothing better than a riddle to me, they were very leal in their hearts to one another, which became them well, poor things, seeing they were their lane in the world.

We were far from a blythe household at this season, though we were abiding in London, in the blythest time of the year, and among great and gay folk. For Mr. Allan took pleasure in nothing, but abode still the whole day in his bit small library; and when he went out with Mary at night, it was with a gloom upon his face that would not be bidden away by any festivity. The very folk that came about the house, and were his own friends, jeered at him for his grave looks;

but Mary—though it is my thought there never was a glance upon his face but she took note of it in her heart—Mary never said a word, but went on upon her own ways. For my own self, I could not but marvel at the two; for here they were dwelling, wasting their own days, and the substance of their bairns; and what was it for?

The day before Mr. Bernard was coming to his dinner, and when I was heavy in my own spirit, and bewildered, and could do nought but aye make my appeal to Him that has the hearts of men in His hand, Mary telled me with a very blythe face, that somebody was to come to meet Mr. Bernard the morn, that she doubted not would be a great friend to him, and give him help in this world. I shook my head, being in a heavy frame of mind.

"My dear," said I, "I will be thankful to

hear tell of it; but truly I would be better pleased if the lad took heart of grace, and helpit himsel."

When I said that, I was thinking upon no person but Mr. Bernard. But, to my wonder, Mr. Allan took the word to himself, and being in the room beside Mary and me, started up to his feet, and paced about like a man in great trouble. Mary never said a word, and neither did I, though I could not choose but watch the young man; and when he was weary of that exercise, he turned round and flung down the book he had been reading, upon the table.

"That is just about the hardest thing in existence," said Mr. Allan, in a strong and meaning way; and then he turned quick upon his heel, and, or ever I could speak, he was out of the room, and his foot went echoing down the stair. We sat still and

listened, Mary and me; but he did not go to his own room, but out at the outer door. I was very sore frighted in my own spirit to speak truth, fearing that Mr. Allan had lost the guidance of himself; and I would not say but Mary had a drither in her heart as well as me. But though she gave a glance out of the window to see the road he took, and wavered in her colour for a moment, she did not say a word. Truly, she had great command over herself.

But it came to pass in the good providence of the Lord, that nothing ill befell, and the next day, according to his tryst, Mr Bernard came to his dinner, with divers other folk. Among the rest, was one young lad, who kent nobody but Mary that I could see; and this callant did nothing all the forepart of the night, but wander about the place where Mr. Bernard might be, aye trying to get a word of him,

and too blate to begin. He was but young, and no very wise, if looks were a rule, but lookit a well-dispositioned callant notwithstanding, and had the grace to be very diffident of himself. Now Mr. Bernard, he was far different. He was here in a company, where every person, as was to be expected, was better endowed in this world's goods than him, and the lad was dour and haughty, and held up his grand high head among them, taking more state upon himself than a prince would have done. It was just a sight to see; but truly, though I see not myself what better the one is than the other, it is easier to make allowance for the pride of poverty, than the pride of riches—and youth has many a foolish thought, harder to put up with than that. But I did not take it for a good sign of him in any manner, the

steady way he lookit down upon this young lad, Mr. Ledaway, who was following after him; for I think it is ever an ill sign of both heart and spirit, when I see clever folk very proud of their cleverness, and ready to use another kindly human person, of whom they ken nothing, like to a fool.

After the dinner was past, Mr. Bernard came to me where I was sitting in an end of the drawing-room, my lane; and I saw the young man was moved out of his ordinary, though I could not tell if it was pleasure or trouble. But he came and sat down beside me, turning about a chair sideways, that he might have no need to look into my face, and then he spoke.

"I have heard from Rhoda, Miss Maitland," said the young lad; and I was not ill-pleased to see that Rhoda's name had

power to bring the colour into his cheek.

"Aye, Mr. Bernard!" said I, "and how does she speak of herself, poor bairn?"

"She says very little of herself," he said, in a hasty way; "but, do you remember the Sunnyside parlour and the Vicar of Wakefield, and your last warning to me, Miss Maitland? It is a humiliating recollection; but I never thought to be tempted like the vagabond philosopher. Ah, I see my memory is better than yours—you forget!"

"Truly, I will not take upon myself to say I mind what you mean," said I, being perplexed; "for the memory of old folk is no like youth. Na; I mind the Vicar of Wakefield well enough, but I cannot mind what I said."

The young man gave a bit short laugh, in the which there was pleasure, after a manner, though likewise he thought shame.

"He had to be content with his wife's fortune," said Mr. Bernard. "I ran no risk of a wife's fortune in those days, and could afford to smile at you, Miss Maitland. But I am a poorer fellow than George Primrose," said the young man, rising up in a proud, impatient, shamefaced way. "I have only been waiting on Providence, as you say, when here is the wife's fortune thrust into my hand."

"I marvel not you should think shame, Mr. Bernard," said I. "Will you tell me how it was?"

So, he sat down again, with another bit laugh, half of anger, when I took him at his word like this, and read to me out of

a letter, how my bairn Grace had made a deed, settling the income she had been used to give to her father, upon Rhoda, and putting it clear in her own hand, to do what she would. Doubtless, the bairn Rhoda, being troth-plighted unto him, and no under the same restraints as would have keepit back many a young thing, had let him ken, in the same letter, that herself and her siller were both waiting on him; but it was not to be thought he would read that to me. So the lad was perturbed in his spirit, as might be expected; and was fain and blythe, and bitter at his own ill succeeding, and shamed at being in her debt for everything, all at the same moment. For he could not make up his mind either to be married, and take his wife's portion, with a free heart, or to put off till he was more even with her, himself. He grudged

both the one and the other. I was grieved for him, the foolish callant! and I was angry at him, as well; for he did not ken what he would be at.

He was scarce done telling me his story, when Mary brought up the other young lad, Mr. Ledaway, to me; but it was well to be seen it was not me he wanted, but Mr. Bernard. Now, whenever Mr. Bernard heard his name—whether he had missed the sound of it before, I do not ken—he drew up his high head, and went away. I likit this proud, perverse callant, in my own mind, I ken not wherefore; and truly I was very vexed to see in him the like of this unkindly and ungenerous pridefulness—for Mary tarried to tell me that this Mr. Ledaway was the foolish young lad that had lost money to Austin Bernard's brother, and got it back again from Austin himself.

I was distressed in my heart, to think upon it; for truly, it was easy to see that this good deed was not done out of an open and free heart, but more out of a compulsion of honour, and pride, and self-regard; and Mr. Bernard could not move himself to aught but a grudging and haughty demeanour to this young man.

Woes me! The ways of the world are hard to tread, and ill to learn; and there is nothing even to the heart of man, for deceitfulness and vanity. I would rather have chosen, for my own part, that he had keepit the siller, than have had an enmity in his heart against the lad he had restored riches and comfort to. But truly, as I have said, he was in a very ill frame of mind, and kent not what he would have; for he railed upon folk for neglecting him, and grudged that it should be in their power

to do him kindness—and yet, for all this, though I could have lickit him with my own hands, so ill-pleased as I was, I could not help but like the callant, evil-tempered though I saw him to be.

Na! though I wiled him myself, all I could, and, also, so did Mary, and Mr. Allan, likewise, when he came to ken how it was, Mr. Bernard would not bow his pride to make any kind of friends with Mr. Ledaway. Truly, though he was not the cleverest, he was the best dispositioned of the two, this other young man; and, though he was abashed, he lookit not angered, but went away early, taking kindly farewell of us all, and giving great thanks to Mary, for asking him here. I think Mr. Bernard learned to think shame of himself, when Mr. Ledaway was gone; but it only made him haughtier in his temper,

whieh was no pleasure to any person; and truly, I was very well pleased, when this paughty callant went away.

CHAPTER XII.

All this time, I had heard no word either from Grace herself, or from the bairn Rhoda, and it may well be thought I was anxious in my own mind concerning them, seeing there behoved to have been great trouble at Oakenshaw after Rhoda went back, and no person there to save Grace from the charge of the young thing, and her wild affliction and sorrow; so that I was very well-pleased to have even the small word from Mr. Bernard, which testified that Rhoda had in some

measure come to herself, and that Grace had both taken pains, and found a feasible way to comfort the bairn in her trouble. For two or three days more, we heard no word of them, having no letters from Oakenshaw, which I accounted for in this wise, that they kent not whether I was to abide or come home, seeing I was very uncertain myself, as also were both Mr. Allan and Mary, in my judgment; and Mr. Bernard did not come near us again, which made me the more blythe to see him in the end of the week, when Mary and me were passing by in the carriage. Mary caused the man to stop, and called upon Mr. Bernard out of the window, and seeing we were very near our own door, he could not but go in with us for civility. The lad's countenance was changed, and I would not say but his manners might be a thought better as well.

It was early in the day, and the tray was upon the dining-room table for some small matter of lunch, to which, being invited, the young man sat down with us, and great was my marvel, when he askit of me if I had any errands in Scotland, for he was going down thither, as he said, the very next day, to Oakenshaw.

"Bless me, Mr. Bernard!" said I.

Now the lad was making most of his converse with me, seeing Mary was uncommon full of thought this day, and Mr. Allan had little patience with Mr. Bernard, besides being taken up with his own troubles; so the young man spoke low, being sitting next to me, and with a colour rising upon his face. He was a changed lad; for truly there was both hope, and courage, and spirit, in his e'en.

"Yes," he said, in a quick way, interrupting

me, " providence, if you choose to term it so—or, at least, a sufficient patron has thought of me at last. The day after I saw you, I had good news; and now I am in circumstances to see Rhoda. I have been offered an appointment, not very great at present, but very promising, and better than I hoped for; and to-morrow I set out for Oakenshaw."

At that, Mary put in her word, and made inquiry what it was; and Mr. Bernard gave to her a more clear account of it, which truly sounded very well, though I was little acquaint with such things, and understood but little what it was. He was to be secretray to some great person, the lad said, and that would bring him in among the rulers of the land, and great folk, where he would have opportunity to win on, and what he called " make a position," and maybe get the length of parliament, as he said—though

what good that would do him, truly I could not tell; but Mary was blythe to hear tell of it, and so was Mr. Allan ; and both of them went into the matter, kenning more about it than the like of me. Mary was pleased in a bye-ordinary manner, as I was just surprised to see her, and Mr. Allan in a more moderate way ; for, poor man, he had but little thought at this time to spare for any concerns but his own, which were grievous and heavy upon him; also, as I have said, he had wonderful little patience with Mr. Bernard, and found fault with his lingering and his dallying, all the more, maybe, because they reflected upon himself.

But anyway, as I have said, Mr. Bernard was in grand spirits, and now that his heart was opened, he could not but tell to us his marvelling how the great person that this favour had come from, had minded upon

him at the last. For, just the very week before, the callant said, he had past him by, and would take no note of him. "And very bitter my feelings were upon the occasion," said Mr. Bernard, looking as if he thought shame, "which made the surprise all the greater, and more welcome; for I had fairly given up hope."

With that, Mary gave a bit quiet smile to herself, as if in some measure she had a suspicion how it came to pass, which was a marvel to me; and then the lad made enquiry at us all, in the fulness of his heart, if we had any word to send to Oakenshaw; for the coming of this prosperity made a great change upon the young man. He was a better callant by far in his joyfulness than he had been in his black, dour, disappointed pride.

"No, no," said Mr. Allan, in a kind of

subdued, angry way, "*we* have no messages to send to a quiet country house like Oakenshaw. Grace would stand aghast to see Mary and you now, Aunt Margaret. No, no messages—unless it were from me."

"And what should Mr. Bernard say from you, Allan?" said Mary, looking up with a wistful glance into his face.

"Nothing—I was mistaken, I have nothing to say," said Mr. Allan. Truly, I kent not what had made him angry; but we are all perverse, every one among us, and he was no better than the rest.

When Mr. Bernard went away, having said his farewell and taken his leave of us, we were no to call left in a very pleasant way, the three of us, Mr. Allan being possessed with an angry spirit, and a kind of

glow upon his face like a smothered fire. Mary, poor thing, had a grand courage; she took no note of his evil looks, but began to speak to me in her common way.

"I wonder how his pride will bear it, when he knows who has done this," said Mary, "for I am very sure it is all the work of that simple lad whom he would not speak to the other night. Poor Mr. Ledaway was very anxious to know how he could serve Mr. Bernard, Allan—you heard him asking me; and I am sure this is the result."

"You are philanthropical as well as fashionable, Mary," said Mr. Allan; "but I forgot—philanthropy *is* fashion. I shall have the delight of seeing you with a train of *protégés* by-and-bye, I suppose."

Mary made no answer; she did not even

lift her head, which was doubtless because tears had come to her e'en; but to be silent was best. Mr. Allan was in a very evil humour, angered at himself, and at every person nighhand; and truly, there was great excuse to be made for him, poor man, considering all the troubles he had upon his mind. I sat quiet myself, trying to look as if I saw nought amiss, and very sore taken up about them both in my own spirit, for what was to come of all this I could not see.

But, after a space, Mr. Allan rose up to go away, and it was not in his heart, having time to think, to leave a wound behind him. So he spoke in a hasty way.

"Mary, I am wrong," he said, speaking very quick, "I am always wrong. I am a fool, and Austin Bernard an abominable

puppy, and his patron a blockhead. There! is that any satisfaction to you? and now, I suppose, I had better be alone, and exercise my temper on myself."

But the two of us, Mary and me, were but little better, as may be thought, when he went away; for I made as though I had not heard, and Mary she went away to the other end of the room, pretending to look for books, but trying all the time to hide her wet e'en from me. It was but a dull day that for us all; in the afternoon, it came on to rain, heavy and fast, and I sat by the window with my seam, looking out upon the drookit London street, and the folk passing by with their umbrellas, and thought upon my own garden at Sunnyside, where doubtless every bit twig upon the thorn hedge was pricking up to meet the sweet May rain, the which would shine as it fell.

Also, I had very heavy thoughts touching the deserted house at Lilliesleaf, and the aged woman Mrs. Elphinstone, and the bairns left to themselves, and very sore cast down I was, and had little heart to my seam, as may well be thought.

Also, Mary was uncommon quiet this whole day, and for the most part sat still at the table, with a small bit desk before her, busy with many papers; and I would not say but she was thinking of Lilliesleaf and the bairns also, and was wearied in her own spirit, for whiles she would rise and go to the window, and look forth upon the rain for a moment, and then go back to her table with a sigh. I could not keep from glancing at her every now and then, though truly, I meant not to spy what she was doing; but the papers were very ill-favoured, and looked just in a bye-ordinary manner like

bills, as I thought. Truly, if she was taking thought upon the sore wastry in this house, and where the siller was to come from, it was a good sign—though I doubted not there was many a sore heart both to her and Mr. Allan in these evil things that Mary was gathering up together. There were many papers, and she laid them all together, and tied them up with a riband; but she said not a word to me.

And we never spoke when we were sitting at our dinner, though Mr. Allan was in better temper then, and would have been conversible if he had gotten encouragement. They were not to be out any place that night, which was very uncommon, but after the dinner was past, Mary went away, and was in her own chamber for a long space of time, and Mr. Allan also left me by

myself, and went forth out of the house, as I thought; and after I had tarried my lane till I was sick at my heart, I went down into the little library, to look if I could find a book to divert me from evil thoughts. But the young man was sitting there himself, and I was wiled to abide a space with him; but truly, for what befell at that time, it behoves me to begin upon a new page, for I will not bring in the like of that after all that I have spoken in the heaviness of my spirit here.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Allan was sitting his lane in the bit small London room, with the lamp burning low upon the table before him, and a book at his hand that he had no heart to read, and the rain pattering on the street without, and whiles making a bit dash upon the window when the wind rose. It was a very eerie night; for, to my thought, a room looks aye very dark and cauldrife in a rainy evening, when it is no the right season to have a fire.

I set down upon the table the candle I had in my hand, but did not put it out, seeing it was my purpose to go away again straightway, and syne I began to look for a book. Mr. Allan did not speak at first, but whether it was that he wanted company, or that my rustling among the books, as is most likely, made him impatient, I will not say, but after a space, he gave a hasty start, and lookit up at me, and spoke:

"Aunt Margaret! unless you are very anxious to improve your mind, do you not think it would be greater charity to sit down quietly and lecture me?"

"I will sit down with goodwill if it is to pleasure you," said I, "but, truly, I think not I am so great at lecturing, Mr. Allan, that I should put forth my gift upon you."

"Am I such a hopeless subject, aunt?" said Mr. Allan, with a laugh. "That is by no means my own opinion; I think I am quite in the humour to be lectured 'with profit,' as your preachers say. Come, aunt, take your place and begin."

"Whisht, callant," said I, "truly, there is but little mirth in my heart."

With that his countenance changed, and after I had taken the seat he gave me, and sat down at the table, he said not a word for a while, but held his brow with his two hands as if it was both hot and heavy, being, doubtless, full of many an unquiet thought.

"No!" said Mr. Allan, at last, "we are not a very cheerful household, I believe, to-night. How long is it, Aunt Margaret, since you came here?"

"It is nigh upon three weeks," said I,

and I could not but give a sigh in my own mind, and think it had been a sore time to me, and that I had been of little good to any person since I came into this great and strange town.

"Three weeks! it was a shame to bid you come—a shame to disturb your own calm and comfort by such a bootless errand," said Mr. Allan, "and here we are still, as far from home as ever; would to God, aunt, we had never left Lilliesleaf!"

"Whisht, Mr. Allan—oh, whisht! and dinna use His name in a heedless way," said I, being troubled at that word.

"Nay; it was a prayer," the young man said, and even when he spoke I heard a sound in the room, and looking up, was very sore started to see Mary standing close by us. He did not see her, for he had both his hands covering his face.

"It was a prayer," said Mr. Allan, "and I say it again from the bottom of my heart —would to God we had never left home—home, nature—our loves and our duties —and all for this miserable phantom here!"

I could not speak a word—I could do nothing but look at my bairn, with her e'en shining upon him, and her face as bonnie and as sweet as ever face of woman was. There was a change in Mary's look, though at that moment I scarce could tell what it was. She had put off her fine gown, and had on a bit simple thing that she whiles wore in the morning at home, and her bonnie hair was shed back, and a small bit lace cap upon her head. It was not Mary a grand lady, but Mary the nursing mother of all her bonnie bairns.

And syne she put her hands upon Mr.

Allan's hands, and drew them away from his brow, and the young man lookit up with a great start, kenning well it was not the like of me that touched him; for well I wot Mary's bonnie soft white fingers were not like the touch of age. He kent not how to look, or what to say, being greatly startled in his own mind; but could do nothing but gaze upon her, as I also did, and, truly, a bonnier face it would have been hard to find.

"If you say that, Allan," said Mary, "why do we not go home?"

The like of that from her!—and truly, she said it as innocent as words could be said, and a very fickle question it was; for he had never minted at going home, nor spoken to her upon the matter, for all so discontent he was. He had reckoned upon her kenning, and was too proud to

speak; and though she did ken very well, and was in no manner of dubiety, she still had justice in what she said.

But Mr. Allan aye keepit his eyes upon her, and made no answer; and then Mary spoke in a more serious way, and as she had meant to speak when she came here.

"I have a great deal to say, Allan," she said, with a bit tremble in her voice, "It is time now to tell you all that is in my heart. You have taken Aunt Margaret into your counsels. I have taken no one—not even so dear and kind an adviser into mine. Is Aunt Margaret to stay, or shall I speak to you alone?"

I rose up quick at that, having little mind to put myself between the two in any manner; but Mr. Allan put forth his hand and laid it upon mine. "Aunt Margaret will stay, Mary," he said, and she

herself lookit at me with tears shining in her bonnie e'en. Wherefore should I be prideful, or feared for them no understanding me, or thinking me a curious person, prying what was between them? I abode without another word; for they were very precious bairns, both the one and the other of them to me.

"Allan," said Mary, "I have a long story to tell you; and it is neither to blame you nor to excuse myself, but because we have come to a point now, and must know each other, what we mean. I will have to begin a long time back. Will you be patient and hear me, Allan?"

The only answer Mr. Allan gave, was drawing a chair close to the table and near his own seat, and causing her to sit down, which the poor bairn had need of, for all the calmness of her manner, for I saw she

scarce could command herself to stand firm, because of a great tremble in her frame.

"I will not say how happy I have been, because you know that as well as I," said Mary, speaking very slow, and making pauses between her words to steady her voice. "I want to tell you of a time when I was very unhappy, Allan. I know—I knew—I always knew—that you meant me no evil; but it was rung into my ears, and the evil spirit whispered it at my very heart. It was said to me that your delight was not in your own house, Allan; that you had greater pleasure in strangers than with us; that there were others who were better companions for you than the wife you had chosen out of your own sphere. They were unworthy, degrading thoughts; but I could not help it—I could not help it! I resisted them as long as I

could; but at last they reached to my heart."

The colour varied and changed on Mr. Allan's face, as I have seen it upon the face of a young woman-bairn; but he never moved from his place, bending forward, looking at her, taking in every word she said. There was no call for him to speak; it was all in Mary's hands.

"I cannot describe that time to you, or to any one," said Mary, "I was wretched—miserable! if I tried to escape from my doubts and suspicions, I was only the more tormented. Everything that came in my way grew a confirmation. It was like a fever, Allan. I seemed only to have command of myself so far as to hide it from you, and from others, as well as it was possible. I did foolish, mad things. I even seemed to countenance the slanders of others.

—I know I did—in the very eagerness of my folly, to convince myself of the reverse. I was very, very wrong; but it was so hard to suppose that henceforward I was only to be your representative at home—only the mistress of the house that was dull and distasteful to you—and that all this would not have happened had you married a more congenial wife."

She took a pause in her speech, poor thing, being breathless with the beating of her heart. Truly, I had my own thoughts a year ago, and feared in my mind that it was thus with my Mary; but it went to my very heart to hear of it from her own mouth. Mr. Allan never lifted his eyes from her, and never stirred; but one while his face was like scarlet, and another as white as the papers on the table. In the very depth of his spirit, he thought shame, and

was stricken. I could read that in his look.

"Yes, I was trying to make up my mind bitterly to be alone," said Mary, "trying to learn what it was to be content, and do my duty after the sunshine and the light were away, when I was startled into a new life, Allan. All that I had heard of blame and reproach, for not understanding nor consulting your tastes, was strangely echoed to me one day—it was Aunt Margaret who did it. I never saw how poor the self-conceit of making a good name for myself as a good wife and a good mother, and leaving my husband to bear his own blame, was till then. And then I looked back upon all my misery; I said to myself, what was poverty—what was loss, even to the bairns, compared to this slower process that might ruin them as well, and would banish hope and pleasure

from their home? And now, Allan, do not condemn me. I knew what a costly sacrifice it would be, and how it might ruin us. I desired that it should *almost* ruin us—that it should show beyond the possibility of mistake where we were standing, when I urged you to bring me here. I have not spared anything, Allan, you know I have not. I have been ingenious in making expenses, in living as people live who have ten times our means and prospects. I confess it all openly and plainly. I have wasted your substance without sparing, and with my eyes open; and now, my husband, Cosmo's father, you are my judge."

But I will not dare to say I lookit at Mr. Allan, or at Mary either, when she made that speech to him. One glance I took, that let me ken how the young man was stunned and dizzy with it all, and how

his face was set, and his e'en gleaming, and repentance, and pride, and wrath, and love, and shame all striving with him, till he had neither power to change his look nor open his lips. I never saw the like of that look upon the face of man, and I kent it was not for me to see. So truly, I took no time to think, but hastened to rise from my seat, and go away. Neither the one nor the other of them heard me go forth, though my very limbs were shaking under me, and my heart sick with trouble and fear. I never tarried till I got to my own chamber, to put up my supplications for them both. Truly, it was a great and sore trial, and the proud spirit of a man that was wont to order his own ways, was like to find it hard, as I thought. My dear bairn! the Lord send she had done aright, and soften the spirit of her husband, that

it might not be lifted up against her. I was so sore moved in my own mind, that I could not stay even to make supplication, but wandered from one room to another, ever listening if I could hear any word of them; but the house was quieter than ever I kent it, and not a sound, good nor evil, could I hear.

CHAPTER XIV.

They were a very long time their lane together, I will not say how long, for I was very anxious, and every minute was like an hour to me; but for all that, when I heard them coming, I went away quick to my own chamber once more, being feared to wait there for them, though I ken not wherefore it should be so. Then I tarried but a moment in the dark, and went back again. I think I was on my feet, coming and going, the whole night.

And also, when I went into the drawing-room beside them, I was feared to look, for all my longing. Mr. Allan was walking up and down the room, maybe no so restless as heretofore, but with a heavy, thoughtful pace, as if he pondered much in his heart; and when I saw his bowed head, and his face, which was white, and full of tokens of a storm that had passed by, truly, I was but little eased. He might be the better for this, but it was well to see he was none the lightsomer in his own spirit, as truly was not to be expected; but it is ill to account for the expectations of mortal folk. Mary was sitting upon a sofa, her lane, speaking not a word; but I was pleased with her demeanour, for though her eye ever followed him, coming and going, it was but the look of a tender heart, that was grieved to make pain, and had neither

trouble nor trembling in it, like of a feared woman, that had angered her husband, the which, seeing I have my own pride, in a manner, I could not have endured to see in any bairn of mine. When I went in, Mary made me a sign to sit down beside her, the which I was not slow to do, though there was little pleasure there for any one of us, and Mr. Allan aye pacing back and forward through the big, dull room.

And my bairn—where she got her spirit or her bravery, truly I do not ken—though I am well assured *I* could not have holden myself up after this fashion—began to make converse with me, no speaking to Mr. Allan for the first while, but soon making an appeal to him, and bringing him nigh unto us by the same. It may well be thought it was little answer I could make to Mary, when she began—though I tried what I could

do to help her—and that it was but sore work for her, poor thing, speaking of matters she was not heeding about herself; but Mary never let down her heart; and before I kent, she began about home. It was not that she said a great deal about it, nor made many phrases; but the voice of thanksgiving and content that was in her speech, I never heard the like of all my days. Mr. Allan looked up once quick and full into her face when she spoke of Lilliesleaf, and then straightway went away again, upon his heavy travel. And I was sore discomposed myself, not kenning what to make answer to her, nor how it was between the two. So with that I said I was wearied, having rested ill the last night (as was the truth, for I was trysted with many evil thoughts), and would even go up to my own chamber. Mary did not hinder me; but when she said "Good

night!" she lookit bright and cheery in my face, and said, loud out: "Aunt, we are going home immediately to Lilliesleaf!"

"God be thankit, my bairn!" said I. But there was that tremor upon my spirit, that I said it whispering, like a guilty person. Now maybe Mr. Allan heard me that I was troubled, or maybe it was but the good nature and kind heart of him that he would not let me depart to my rest unsatisfied in my spirit. He came to me, when I was on my road to the door, and took my hand into his own.

"A man does not come through an ordeal like this more than once in his life, Aunt Margaret," said Mr. Allen with a kind of doubtful smile; "and I am not exactly myself to-night; but do not grieve your kind heart about us. We understand each other now, Mary and I."

I was content with this, and tarried not to say a single word, for all that I was much perturbed still in my own spirit; for truly I wanted more than the like of this speech to put me in comfort. Was he angered? Was he pleased? Was there offence between the two? But I could not tell. I went to my room, and lay down my bed; but little sleep came to my eyelids that whole night; and also—which was but little help to my rest—I could not but think I heard Mr. Allan's foot pacing up and down in his room, and a far-away whisper, as of folk in earnest converse, far into the night.

And we were not more cheery, to tell the truth, even at our breakfast in the morning, when even Mary, that had keepit her heart so well was, athought downcast, and looked white, and was far from well in her health, as I could see. It was a sore trial to me sitting down

to break bread after that fashion; for Mr. Allan was so taken up in his own thoughts that he minded not even to crave a blessing, and neither Mary nor him cared for tasting a thing, but took their tea in a listless silent way, the which went to my heart. And what was I that I could put in my word between married folk?

At last, it chanced that looking up, I saw tears coming quiet and gentle from Mary's e'en. She noted not that I saw her; the bairn's heart was grit with her own thoughts.

"Allan!" she said; and then Mary made a stop; and the tears—which I saw were not the bitter tears of present trouble, but soft like them that belong to an old and sacred grief. "I was thinking of the time when God came last to Lilliesleaf, and took His gift away."

Mr. Allan started at the first sound of

her voice, and lookit up. The heart of the young man was as tender as a bairn's, and seeing he was thinking of other, and of far different things, the thought of this came on him unawares. My own e'en were blind that I scarce could see; but I heard that him who was the father of two bairns, departed among the angels, burst out for a moment into a strong sob and a cry, minding upon the sore pang of that departing; and syne rose up in his haste, and took his wife intill his arms, and cried out to her that this was but care and the trouble of this world, and that neither loss nor death had come to Lilliesleaf. Blessings upon their bonnie heads every one! No! the Lord be thanked! there had no harm come upon the bairns.

And from that hour—seeing it was an hour in the which the Lord himself put

forth His hand, and moved the young man's heart—the gloom upon Mr. Allan's face cleared away. If he had been ill-pleased with Mary, or if his pride was hurt, to get a lesson like to this, or if he was troubled in his own mind with thought of his own ill-doing, or if all these were a weight upon him at the same time, as well might be, truly I have no way of kenning; but this I could well perceive, that, from that day, the young man arose, and girded himself for what was before him. He abode no more either in silence or in idleset; he lingered not any more a moody man, in his room his lane, or sat in discontent beside Mary and me. Truly, it is not for me to say the manner of the Lord's working upon his heart—but this I ken, that he was wakened in time to judge between the false and the true. Allan Elphinstone was of that spirit

that he never meant to do evil to another person, all his days; and when his ain very Mary, that was nearest and dearest to him, opened up her heart, and let him see how his thoughtless fashions had been to her nighhand the bitterness of death; and when his e'en were opened to perceive how near destruction to his house, and ruin to his bairns, his wilful ways had brought, and syne when the touch of love and tenderness came till him, and he minded upon the true trials of this life, and the sorrow that God sends, and upon them that were in heaven, but still were his bairns, his very heart and spirit were moved beneath the hand of the Lord. The Lord grant him a steadfast heart!—truly, this was all the petition that was needful for me to make, when I lookit, and beheld, with trembling and thankfulness, what bles-

sing His hand had sent upon Mr. Allan, and upon my brave bairn.

When we rose up from the table, we were none of us in a very composed or sober frame of mind; for the tears were glancing still in Mr. Allan's e'en, and Mary was like a no weel person, very sore worn out and exhausted; and for my own self, it cost me much pains to keep a measure of composedness, and demean myself after a seemly fashion. When Mr. Allan went forth of the room for a time, my dear bairn came to me, and laid her head on my breast, and wept tears, which were an easement to her eyes, and to her heart, poor bairn! and very blythe I was to be so nearhand, and a support to Mary, in a measure. When Mr. Allan came back again, his very foot upon the stair was a pleasure to hear. I take great note of folk's

footsteps, myself; and the ring of a man's foot that has lawful business in his hand, and heart to do it aright, is the grandest morning sound that can be, and better than music. Truly, my heart was moved to be proud of him, when he came in, with both life and courage on his face. I was feared for Lilliesleaf no more.

But the two had changed spirits, as it seemed to me, for this day. Mary was very sore worn out, poor bairn! and though she grew very cheery in her converse, being busy with him concerning many needful matters, and aye the other blythe word about home, she was very fain to lie down upon the sofa, with me sitting beside her, and to take a long rest in quietness, when Mr. Allan went out—which was very far from Mary's way, seeing she never was very caring about idleset, but liked to have

something ever in hand. We had but little converse, her and me, for a long space of time; and then she bade me draw my chair close; and we communed together with great comfort and ease to both our hearts. And it was now I telled her first what the minister, my brother, said, that everything they had, was to be at her pleasure, to ease Mr. Allan and her of the present burdens; and, also, minded her that I had divers pickles of siller, myself. Mary was very well pleased and comforted in her mind, to hear that; and, also, had such comfort in hearing what her father said, that the tears came to her e'en once more.

"And even my mother's scruples will be satisfied, when we go home," said my dear bairn; and with that, she put no more force upon herself, but even cried like a

little bairn, and smiled again, with the tears in her e'en, and gave thanks out of a full heart; and truly, I will not make any pretence that I was stronger in my spirit, or of a more composed demeanour, my own self, for all I am an aged woman, and should ken how to thole cannily, whether they be for joy or sorrow, the changes of this world.

CHAPTER XV.

Both that day and the next were very busy days with Mr. Allan; and doubtless I was not surprised, kenning how much behoved to be done, before a household like to this could be flitted away. Also, I came to understand that the minister's siller would be very handy at the present moment; and he had even to be asked for it; and that, maybe, it might be a week or more before everything was settled, and we could win away.

It came to pass that many letters came to us by the post the very next morning—some of them being far from pleasant to Mr. Allan and Mary, being letters seeking siller; but Mr. Allan had also one, the which being written in Cosmo's hand, was more interest to me. It was but a short letter, and though it brought the colour to his brow, he was not ill-pleased; though truly, I am very doubtful if it was a proper letter to be written by a bairn. This is what Cosmo said:

"Dear Papa,

"Will you come home? I am wearied waiting, and aye thinking what mamma's letter will tell us. There is nothing right at Lilliesleaf, and the folk are not feared to speak before me, and say you ought to be here; and it is no good fighting with grand-

mamma, though she flytes the whole day at you, till I am mad to hear her. They blame everything that is wrong upon you, from Sedgie Burn to Burrowstoun, and I gave Willie Ramsay the best licking he ever got in his life, yesterday, down at the Moss for something he said; but don't tell mamma, for she would be ill-pleased. I am getting no lessons, neither is Claud; and grandpapa and everybody says everything is going wrong, and the men will not let me speak, but smile at me as if I was a bairn—and papa, will you come home?

"Cosmo Elphinstone."

"P.S.—Nobody knows I am writing; for all the rest are little, and weary to see mamma, but never think of anything—so this is only from me."

Mr. Allan read Cosmo's letter outloud to

us, every word of it; and if it had come two or three days before, I doubt not the young man would have been sore angered, and also have thought shame. This morning, the red colour rose to his brow, as it ever did when he was moved in any manner, and he put up the letter into his pocket when he was done with it. Doubtless, it was but a strange letter to come from a bairn.

"Cosmo's championship is worth having," said Mr. Allan. "He will be a stronger man than his father, Mary, and do credit to your blood. I will write to him myself, to-day."

And it was just wonderful to see what an agitation of spirit came upon Mary, touching the bairn's letter, and the answer his papa would write to it—her that never had faltered in the greatest of her trials;

but she was aye very anxious about the callant's high spirit, and feared for him setting up against Mr. Allan, which, doubtless, was the reason of her flutter and perplexity this day. When I was sorting my cap before dinner-time, she came to me with a look of troubled pleasure, very blythe, but far from composed, to tell me—and the silly thing scarce spoke above her breath—that Mr. Allan had written his letter and how thankful she was. "A loving hand may lead Cosmo anywhere, aunt; but he is not a boy to be daunted—and that is why I *was* so nervous, and *am* so glad," said Mary, in a kind of breathless way. Truly, I could not but marvel within myself; for her that was strong in some trials, was but a weak woman here.

I have said we had many letters that day, and so we had, forbye the ill-favoured ones

that came seeking siller—tidings from most of the family, and a big letter to me from Oakenshaw. I was very anxious about this myself, seeing it was the first I had heard, except one small letter, asking how I was, from Grace; and I took it to the corner of the window to read it in quiet, while Mary and Mr. Allan were holding counsel, and truly, as it is easier for me to put down Grace's words, than to tell the same story in my own, I will write it all here.

"Rhoda's lover has come to Oakenshaw." (This was what Grace wrote to me.) "That is to say, I am led to the conclusion that he is Rhoda's lover, from his coming here, and from the perpetual warfare which both of them seem to think perfectly legitimate and appropriate. They are a strange couple, and I smile to think of them under your

wing, and marvel at your patience, my dear aunt. I suppose they mean to be married; for Rhoda informed me at once when I told her of the settlement we had made of my father's income—of the use it was destined to. She understands her betrothed pretty well, I think; but she does not understand some dogged, dour, half-spiteful pride he has about him, which seems to make the doer of a favour an immediate enemy to this young man. It happens very well for Rhoda that he got this appointment at so fortunate a time; for otherwise, I am afraid her little fortune, and the power it gave her of helping him, would have made a breach between them, and vexed her heart, poor child. I am not sure that I like this Mr. Bernard, aunt, and am much disposed to think that marrying him will be a dangerous experiment; but 'every man kens his own ken

best,' as the proverb says, and, perhaps, he has good enough reason for his bitterness against that common foe of poor men, the world. I was inclined to think he had behaved very nobly about that ill-gotten gear of his brother's before he came—but I am puzzled now, even in respect to this—to hate the person he has befriended, as he seems to do, is so very strange.

"You will suppose that Oakenshaw does not quite recognise itself with these young people in possession, and we have serious thoughts of a family visit to Pasturelands, where the Manse, I am afraid, is dull enough just now. I will tell you more of this next time; but I heartily wish that Mary—not to say yourself—could be first at home."

Truly, this was very pleasant tidings, so far as I felt it, for my own self; but I was

not just so sure about Mary and Mr. Allan, seeing, doubtless, they would like to have fair possession of their own house, and feel it under their hand again, before they were heeding about strangers; and Mary, I could see, was of my thought, when I let her see the letter. As for Mr. Allan, he was quite blythe and content with everything; for the young man felt once more the ground below his feet, and was not dismayed at the troubles before him, seeing he had looked them in the face, and kent how ill they were, and feared no more a sorer ghost behind.

I will not say but what I had great pleasure myself, having my ain pride, as ever comes natural to mortal folk—in the thought that the minister, my brother, and no other person, was the one to help Mr. Allan in winning out of this perplexity; and though prudent folk might even think it was ill-

done of Claud, and would have been better laid by for the bairns, than helping the need that had been brought by wastry, the like of that thought never troubled me; though, truly, there was just this drawback, that the minister, having served him with siller, was no so free to give an advice to the young man; but I never reflected upon that, and truly, as it turned out, I had little need.

We were great in our writing, that day, both Mary and me. In the pleasure of my heart, I behoved to write to both the minister, and Mary, my sister, to let them ken the good news—and, also, to Grace, and a line, likewise, to Jenny, at Sunnyside, bidding her to be ready for my home-coming, which, I doubt not, the poor body would be blythe to hear of. Truly, when I looked at my four letters, I was

not without a moving of vanity in my own spirit; for I will not say but it was a great correspondence for the like of me, at my years.

And this week was a busy time. I marvelled much, myself, how it could be that folk could part with servants, and leave a house, in so small a space of time; and I cannot take upon me to tell how they did it, though, I doubt not, it cost some waste of siller. But the ways of this great London town were far different from the ways of a country place; and the maids and the men did not aim at long abiding in one house, nor were, in any manner, bound to a family, as I suppose, but changed masters and mistresses very easy, to judge by what the ladies said, that I have heard speaking to Mary upon such things. There was one very neat-handed, purpose-like,

discreet young woman, that was Mary's own maid, who was to go to Lilliesleaf with us; and there was no fash about parting with the other ones. And so, it came to pass, in the space of ten days, that the house was full of packing, and trunks, and boxes standing about every place—and the next morning was the blythe morning when we were to go away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE next day was a bright day of June, warm and fair; and truly it was a more heartsome journey for me than my last travel, seeing this whole tangled web was now redd up, and we were all going home. It was a very long travel for an aged person; and Mr. Allan being very considerate, and minding that there was a drive of three or four miles at the end of the journey, made two days of it; and we tarried for a night in the middle of the road. We were all very blythe, but

yet we had our own thoughts; and it was not like that Mr. Allan could be very free in his mind, seeing he still had many a care upon him, and was returning a poorer man than he came. Also, Mary's very thankfulness made her that she had little to say; and truly it was a marvel to me what a change had passed upon the bairn's demeanour from the time of her telling plain out to Mr. Allan what was in her heart. From that night she had left all things to his guidance, and was more like a person taking a long rest, her labour being bye, than one that still was busy with the concerns of this life. Also, her cheek was white, and her step slow, and I will not say I wes free of an anxious thought concerning my dear bairn.

And when we came to our own countryside once again, and travelled swift through roads we kent, silence fell upon them both.

We did not say a word when we stoppit at last, and saw the Lilliesleaf carriage waiting, and kent faces looking anxious for us, and the minister himself, my brother, holding up little Susie high in his arms, that she might have the first chance to see mamma. Blessings on the bairn! what a cry she gave in her joy when she saw her ain mother's face—and all the rest of them like to get their death with eagerness, pressing so near-hand that I trembled every moment to see them fall upon the weary railroad that harms so many thoughtless folk. But we were all landed safe at last; and truly I think the voice of the rejoicing might well have been heard half a mile of gate. My sister Mary was likewise there, and every one of the bairns; and though Cosmo and the minister were both riding, it may well be thought we were a full coach driving home to Lilliesleaf.

The servants were all gathered at the door when we lighted there, looking their blythest. And, it being late in the day, the dinner was laid, and old Mrs. Elphinstone herself receiving the strangers, being stronger far than she had been. Truly it was a very joyful house that night; and the tears ever came to Mary's e'en as she noted every one of the bairns, how big they had grown. I kent an odds on Cosmo my own self, though I had been but a month away; and Mary upheld with me till I was nighhand angered, that little Mary, being ten months younger, was as big now as my own little bairn Maggie at Oakenshaw. Mary, my sister, gave a nod of her head at that, and held up her finger to the little things who were all just in trouble to get out something, but turned as quiet as could be, and whispered to one another when she did that; and for me, I was so

slow of the uptake, and Mary and Mr. Allan so concerned with the home-coming, and the pleasure of hearing the bairn's voices, and all well, that none of us were moved to see that there was a secret, or to crave what it was.

And for all we were wearied, both Mary and me behoved to go up the stair, and see them in their beds, every one. Cosmo, being a big callant, very near thought shame, when his mother drew his curtain, and bent down to kiss him, the way she did when he was very little; but the next moment, he got her hand, and laid his cheek on it, and tried no to greet, though he was very nearhand it, and said something no person could hear, about being glad. Truly, it was better than a very grand speech to Mary;—and the two little girls, they clung about her neck, and would scarce let

her away from them; and Claud, before we could win to his room, came marching into the nursery, with his long white night-gown, and his curly black head, no being so shame-faced as Cosmo, to let his mamma see a very bonnie little thing he had made for her, all out of his own head, the time she was away. When they were all laid down, and had gotten their "good-night," we were scarce heeding about going down the stair, Mary and me—for truly, the bairn's joy and thankfulness were great, and it was pleasure enough to her, to wander about the well-kent place, and go from room to room, in the bonnie moonlight, and look out upon the sweet summer country-side, and feel she was at home—though, for myself, I was aye a thought anxious about her, and was pleased when Mr. Allan came and took her away, and

set her in a big chair, in her own place. He saw she was not strong, as well as me; and, for all his faults, he never, at his worst time, would have let the very wind come unkindly on Mary's cheek.

The next morning—I was very wakeful myself, and it was very sore work keeping the bairns out of their mamma's room, long enough to let her get a right sleep—I could not fail to see that every one of them, from Cosmo to Susie, was just bursting with some grand secret that we did not ken; and truly, it was a divert to see them, aye so near letting it out, and syne running away into the corners, and whispering to one another, and giving aye the other merry look at us.

"Oh, mamma!" Susie would cry out; and then the bairn would stop, and hide her bit face, and laugh to herself, till

it could not be bid; and syne little Mary, she lookit at her in a reproving manner, like a serious little woman, as Mary aye looks. And syne, I heard Claud whisper, "May I tell?—Grandmamma did not say we were not to tell this morning." And Cosmo gave him a dunt with his arm, and cried "Whisht!" out loud.

It was a great divert to look upon them; but truly, by this time we were all as taken up about the secret, as we could be.

The breakfast had not been off the table half an hour, and they were all in the parlour, with all their new toys and books that we had brought from London, when the sound of wheels came along the road. It was a very quiet, still day, with the sunshine warm and bright, like as if it hushed everything, and keepit the very air in quietness; and the sound came far upon the

road. Now, at that, every one of the bairns ran to the windows, and Cosmo himself cried "They're coming!" and looked to his mamma. I rose to the window, myself, being startled—and what should it be but Grace's own bit little carriage, with the two gray ponies, and herself in it, and my dear little Maggie, coming quick, with Mary, my sister, to the door of Lilliesleaf.

"I wanted to tell, mamma, but Mary would not let me. Oh, grandmamma, we never telled!" cried little Susie, running to the door. The bairns were just wild with their own good pleasure; for to keep a secret a whole night, was a grand thing for the like of them. And I will not say what gladness was in my spirit to look upon all my bairns together in one place, as in the days of their youth—for truly, Claud, my nephew, was not far behind, walking up the

road with the minister; and great rejoicing was in this house.

Now, after they had all made their greetings one to another, and were very blythe together, and as full of comfort and pleasure as young folk in their strength and the prime of their days could be—I will not say but I was very proud in my own mind to look upon them, great and small, being all our own bairns. There they were, a big family—two generations; and here were we —aged folk, that the Lord had spared to see children's children, according to His word and promise; and some sore troubles had passed away, and some had come to nought, and the Lord had even dealt after His ain bountiful fashion, and ordained far better for us than we could have ordained for ourselves. And truly, it was meet that the like of us, spared to see both joy and

peace, and deliverance, and have pleasure of the work of our own hands, in our old days, should stand apart and lift up our hearts in thankfulness, giving praise unto the Lord!

Now, it may well be thought I was not to let Mary have all her own way, now when there was means of kenning; and truly, when little Mary and my Maggie stood up together, Maggie was as much as half a head, to my own certain sight, the biggest of the two—the which was a great divert to the fathers and the mothers to see me taken up about the like, though I would not say but Grace was pleased herself.

"Mary is only seven, Aunt Margaret," said little Maggie, "and I mind when she was a very wee baby; she was aye littler than me."

For they were very great friends, all the bairns, and aye took one another's part;

and Maggie was much concerned, poor bit thing, for fear any person might think it was Mary's blame. So they all went out upon the bonnie green lawn to their own plays, and one of them would run every five minutes to tell something to Mary or Grace, or my sister, or me—and truly, what with our pleasant converse in the parlour, and all the little things within our sight, and the sound of their bits of voices and footsteps, making glad the very air—truly, as I have said, I think not there could be a more joyful or contented house, far or near, through the whole country-side.

CHAPTER XVII.

After a space, when we had all had comfort in our own cracks, and questioned with one another concerning what was nearest to our hearts, I minded upon Rhoda, and was troubled to think what might have come of this bairn. So I rose up from where I was, to seek Grace, who was in particular converse with Mary. It was long since the two had met, and they had many a thing to tell over together, being aye like to two sisters, now, as much as in their young days.

"Grace, my dear," said I, in my haste, "you have surely never come away out of Oakenshaw, and left Rhoda her lane, and still in her sorrow, poor bairn?"

Grace smiled and shook her head. "I have not done anything so improper, aunt; but Rhoda is less 'in her sorrow' than you would suppose. Rhoda is with us at the Manse, and only did not come here to-day, because either caprice or delicacy persuaded her that we would prefer being by ourselves at first. She is to come by-and-bye. I have not hesitated to bring a whole family upon you, Mary."

"How well Claud looks," said Mary turning off that question—but when I looked in the same airt that Mary's eyes were looking, truly, I soon saw it was not Claud but Mr. Allan that her anxious glance was travelling to—for the poor bairn had studied

his looks so long, that she behoved to ken that he was pleased, before she could take any comfort in being pleased herself—and, doubtless, he looked very content, and full of new plans about his lands, making calculations, and taking thought concerning everything; for he was a lad of that temper, that it was aye a necessity for him, whether in business or in pleasure, to have something by the hand.

"Ay," said I, "Claud is a blythe man this day, to be among so many friends; but, Grace, my dear, you're no meaning that you have any thought of displeasure against Rhoda? The poor thing was very sore distressed when I parted with her, and has come through a heavy trial; but you have no cause to be angered at her, Grace?"

"No, no; not the least cause," said Grace, "we are very good friends, aunt. I under-

stand Rhoda's rebellions now, and can tolerate them very well; and she puts up with me, really, very admirably, considering everything; but thinks me a very old wife, indeed, in comparison with Aunt Margaret. Mary, do you give in to it?" said my bairn, laughing, "are you content to be as old as Rhoda considers me."

"I am quite content to be older than my aunt," said Mary, "my aunt has carried her youth safely over this stormy time, where we have lost ours."

"Bairns—bairns!" said I, "it is very little you ken that say the like of that to me. Na, I would not say but age and youth have more similitude together than either the one or the other has with you; but, truly, it is my hope you will both live to ken what an odds there is between folk that wait quiet for the ending of their days, and them that

are pressing brave like you, through the midmost of their life."

Neither the one nor the other of them could say a word in answer to me, when I said that, though I have little doubt they both believed all that they had said, and felt the cares of this life sorer upon themselves, and had less command of their own spirits than the like of me. And it is even so, without dispute—and old folk and young folk can put up with many a thing that is a sore fret to the spirit of them that are doing the warfare of their life.

Now we were scarce ended of our converse, when looking out at the end window, I saw Rhoda coming her lane along the road; and seeing she might be solitary in her own spirit among such a meeting of near friends, I went out to the door to bring her in myself. It was a very bonnie day, as I have said, and

the bairns being round upon the lawn at the other side, there was but a far-off sound of their voices, and everything else as quiet as it could be under the broad, warm, basking sun—so quiet that you heard the crack of the seed-husks on a great bush of gorse near at hand—a sound that ever puts me in mind of moorland places, and of the very heart and heat of summer days. Rhoda, poor bairn, was in very deep black, as it behoved her to be, and was coming in a kind of wandering, thoughtful way, her lane, down the bright sandy road, and below the broad branches of the chesnut trees that scarce had a rustle in them, so little air was abroad; and the bit crush of her foot upon the sand was like to a louder echo of the whins, and made a very strange kind of harmony in the quietness. She had been sore overpowered with her grief, when I had bidden her fare-

well—so sore, that to leave the bairn was a heavy thought upon my spirit; and I was likewise well-nigh feared how it would be when I met her again, and brought all her first trouble to her mind. Wherefore, I stood in a very doubtful manner waiting anxious for her upon the threshold of Mary's door.

Truly, I might have forborne to trouble myself. When she saw me, she gave a start, and came fleeing forward, and grippit me round the neck in her wild way, before I was aware. "There is one good hug," cried out Rhoda. "Are you quite well, old lady? Are you very tired? Were you pleased to be rid of me? For I don't think anybody is so glad as I am to have you come home."

"My bairn," said I, "I am very blythe it pleases you; but you must even learn to be

discreet, Rhoda, my dear, and no fall upon an aged woman in such a wild way. Truly, you are coming to a sober time of life, and must not be an ill bairn any more."

With that, she looked up at me with her old laugh, half mocking. "I am only nineteen, for all you say," said Rhoda; "but you may scold me as much as you like, and I will never grumble. It is very funny sometimes when you scold me; and I always will love *you*, whatever you may say. Ah! I forgot—I forgot," said the bairn, holding down her head for a moment's space. "I was crazy with grief for poor papa, when you went away."

"My dear bairn!" said I, putting my hand upon her arm, to comfort her. "It is my hope all is well with him, and you have gotten great consolations in your own mind."

She abode quiet when I said that, for a minute—truly, I think not it was longer time —and then she threw off some tears that were about her e'en in a hasty manner, half as if she thought shame.

"I don't know about the great consolations," said Rhoda, "but somehow it wears off, when one knows it cannot be helped. Poor papa! I loved him very much, though he was not always very kind to me; and still I think of him every day."

She might well do that, for it was not more than five or six weeks since the first word came—and truly, she was like to go out of her wits with the great stroke; but I may well say—for all so often as I have said it before—that she was very different from the like of us, this strange bairn. She got out her sorrow in a great despair and passion, like to destroy herself, and syne was done

with it. It was not such-like mourning as I had been used to see.

"And there have been so many things since then," said Rhoda. "I do not want to go in yet. I want to tell you everything. Wait till I run for your bonnet. I have so much to say to you."

With that, she left me standing in the passage, and flew up the stair. I will not say I had any thought to resist, for of my own self, I was anxious to hear all the bairn had to say. So straightway she came down again, and threw on my bonnet upon my head, and a great big heavy shawl that we had used upon our travel. The thoughtless thing! to bring me the like of that upon such a day; but truly, I was not feared for harm, seeing it was very warm and pleasant, so I even made her lay the great hap upon the table, and went forth with her just as I

was, having a bit small Shetland shawlie upon me beforehand, over my brown silk gown.

"A great many things have happened since," said Rhoda; "Mrs. Lennox sent me home a ring that poor papa used to wear. I wear it myself now, for poor papa's sake; but it was not his diamond. My aunt kept that, I suppose, because it was worth something, and I should only have cared for it, because it was poor papa's; and then, you know, my sister Grace spoke to me one day. I was ill at first when I went back to Oakenshaw, and wanted very much to die, and was very wretched," said the bairn, making a stop for a moment, and putting up her hand to her e'en once more. "I was not good at all, nor patient, nor anything; but *so* miserable! and though I am sure she must have felt me a great trouble, my sister was very

kind to me. She was sorry for poor papa, too. I was very thankful to her for that."

All this was said with bits of stops and pauses, seeing the bairn's heart was full for the time; and then her voice steadied, and she went on.

"When I was better, my sister came and spoke to me one day. I thought something more had happened—some other misfortune, she was so delicate of telling me. My sister was afraid of hurting my feelings," said Rhoda, with a small burst of a bit little trembling laugh, "when she came to tell me I was quite an heiress, and had a fortune; and I think if she could have cheated me and made me suppose it was poor papa's, and he had left it to me of himself, she would; but I knew a great deal better than that. I suppose you know all about it? that I am quite rich now? But, when

papa had all that money, do you not think it was very cruel of him to send me away?"

"Whisht, my bairn," said I, "whatever might have been, there is no blame to be laid to his charge now."

"No," said Rhoda, "but he must not have cared for me very much after all," and with that she gave a bit sigh, and syne her face cleared up again; "when I heard of that, of course I thought the very first thing of—of Austin—that was right enough, was it not? for the money was no good to me if he was to be poor—was not I right?"

"Truly, my bairn, I see not what else you could have done," said I.

"Do you think so? Well, I don't care what any one says if *you* think so," cried out Rhoda, clapping her hands, "you are

proper enough for everybody, and a very good old lady, and now it *was* right, I know. Very well, I wrote to him all about it, and he wrote me very tiresome letters, as cross as possible, till he got this appointment, and then he came down to Oakenshaw; and I had a very great mind to send him to Sunnyside," said Rhoda, with a laugh, "it would have been such fun to see him in your room, with Jenny waiting upon him; but he went to the Burrowstoun inn instead;—and I don't know what is to happen—for we are very cross and quarrel perpetually—and I am sure of nothing but one thing—I am very glad you have come home!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Now, I will not say that I was much taken up about what Rhoda said, that her and Mr. Bernard were aye casting out—for the common word makes light of such quarrels, and I kent the restless spirits of both the two of them, and that there might be plenty love, but there never would be great peace where they were—so I gave myself small trouble upon that head. But truly, when I began to put questions to her, touching what they might mean to do, I

could get no manner of satisfaction; for Rhoda would do nothing but laugh, and pout her bit red lip, and shake her saucy head, like a very froward and ill-willy bairn as she was; so that it was very ill to come to any right knowledge of the matter; and I was sore perplexed, in my own mind, kenning well that two young things like them could not abide after this fashion, but behoved to make up their minds either to one thing or another; though it was easy to see that this very thing that troubled me, was pure pleasure to Rhoda, being very full of mischief, and of a most tantalizing temper as ever I saw in a bairn.

Now, it is not to be thought that I would dally my time, wandering about there with this young thing, hearing all her stories; so, by the time we came to the other side of the house, where the bairns were blythe

in their play upon the grass, I left Rhoda among them, and went back to the house myself. It was just a marvel to me, to see how she had gotten up her heart; but, doubtless, the love she had for her papa, was no just like what that same love would have been, had he been a righteous and godly man; and, also, great allowance was to be made for her manner of up-bringing, and for a hasty spirit, that could thole violence, but could not bear to be bowed down by the daily burden of a sore grief. It might, maybe, have been in more accord with what I thought of nature myself, if Rhoda had minded more upon what befell so late; but truly, for every other reason, I was greatly relieved, in my own spirit, to find how soon youth, and a good prospect in this world, had brought comfort to the bairn.

But when I took occasion, in the course of the day, to speak to Grace about the concerns of these two young folk, Grace was just as little acquaint as I was, and kent not a thing of what their plans might be. To tell true, I do not think my bairn had ever given a serious thought to the matter, but made more a divert of the two, and their strange fashions, than gave consideration to it, to bring things to a sober ending —the which I reproved her for, being Rhoda's nearest friend, and a person of judgment, herself.

"I have no doubt you are quite right, aunt," said Grace to me, though she could not forbear a smile, all the time; "but it is almost ridiculous to think of Rhoda and her lover settling down like quiet people, and being married. They seem born to provoke, and aggravate, and torment each

other. That is all very well, now; but, suppose there was no longer any uncertainty—nothing to tantalize, and be tantalized about—no chance of Mr. Bernard going away in a fit of despair, or of Rhoda refusing to have anything to say to him—aunt, aunt! what would the poor children do? It is capital sport at present; but it would be very poor fun, indeed, as Rhoda says, if they were married!"

"Bless me, Grace!" said I, "is that a way to speak? Truly, I think not this is any jest, but rather the beginning of their life."

"Yes, aunt," said Grace, "that is quite true; but they will have to find out its importance for themselves."

Now truly I was troubled about this matter; for it was not seemly to my thinking. For here was the young lad putting off his time,

when he should have departed to his lawful labours—and *her* bit head full of idle fancies, that should have been sobered and steadied to think upon her true life; and though courting may be pleasant enough pastime—I will not say—it is even very possible that there may be over much of it, and nothing but an off-put of time, and a weariness at the hinder end.

It was close upon our dinner-time when Mr. Bernard, having been at the Manse, seeking for them there, came to Lilliesleaf. The lad was looking all the better himself for abiding in a country place, and his face had not the look of care or of bitterness that it had when I forgathered with him first the day I lost my road in the great town of London. Also he was more content that no person was meaning evil towards him, and could put up with a neglect, being more

assured in his own condition. Doubtless, though every one here had a kindly purpose towards the young man, it was a meeting of near friends, and we had all many things to say to one another, and could not aye be considering the two strangers; though I may well say Rhoda needed but little at our hands, being just as kindly about the house as any one of us, and cracking away to old Mrs. Elphinstone, which was a great ease to me, and divert to her—and no feared to make her saucy speeches to the very minister himself; for Claud, my brother, being not one to judge by the first appearance, had taken a kindness to Rhoda the time she was dwelling in Sunnyside, and aye upheld that for all her wild ways there was good in her; and for her part, I think not Rhoda stood in awe of any person so much as the minister, though he was ever as kind to her as he could be.

Now folk may marvel that I have so little to say of Mrs. Elphinstone, seeing she was not like to be in this company without putting in her word. But for one thing she was far stronger in her health, which made her, maybe, more peaceable in her spirit, and likewise being so many of us here at one time, all friends to Mary, made her hold her peace, in a measure, at my poor bairn; and doubtless, I will not say but in a manner she was thankful to get back her son, and see him cheery, and to hear tell of his intent to abide at Lilliesleaf, and also of the grand friends he had made in London; for the titles of the folk, though she kent not one of them, were pleasant to his mother's ear. Whatever the reason might be—and it is my hope the Lord was working upon her spirit, to win her from all evil ways forbye—she was bye-ordinary quiet, and kindly in her demeanour

this night, which was a great thing for the comfort of the house; and very thankful Mary was, as I could see. For Mary was more feared for what her good mother might say before Claud and Grace, and even before my sister and my brother, that kent her better, than for any other thing, and was as grateful to Mrs. Elphinstone for holding her peace, and to Rhoda for diverting her with converse, as could be. Then the bairns came all in after the dinner, which was a pleasure to every person there, except, maybe, to Mr. Bernard, who was not much like to be heeding about bairns; and a great stir and commotion they made in the room, Mr. Allan being as blythe among them as if he was a callant himself, and no feared to begin with any manner of play, and very proud to see how pleased all the little things were to have him back among them. Truly, I will

not say you could see many places in the country more cheery than just the big dining-room of Lilliesleaf, with the sweeties, and the early berries, and such fruit as was to be gotten at that season, upon the table, and the great silver basket, full of red and white roses, still set in the midst, and content folk, old and young, sitting by, and the bairns about the room, as bonnie and as sweet as flowers themselves. Truly, it was a very heartsome time; and we were here, all the conditions of human folk, in one room together—age, that was waiting for its call, kenning its labour over—and the strong hearts that were in the full tide of their days, living their life—and youth that was at its beginning, and had the whole world in its fancy, and kent not what the morrow might bring forth—and the bairns, the heirs of grace, that kent neither fear nor evil; and we were all well,

and every one of us had our own good hope. Blessings on the name of the Lord for His ain good work, and for all His kindly ways among the children of men!

CHAPTER XIX.

The next morning after that, it so chanced that Rhoda and me, seeing the bairn had come over early in the day, being bound in her spirit, to tell her bits of stories to some person, and nobody having the like leisure for them as me—were sitting our lane in the lightsome morning parlour, Mary being out with Mr. Allan, and the bairns gone for their walk with the maids. I was well pleased to get this opportunity with Rhoda, by our two selves, and no

person with us; for we were trysted to go down to Sunnyside with Grace, in the afternoon, and were like to have plenty to take us up for many days. So, I was even preparing, in my own mind, to speak in a serious manner, to the young thing, and to question her concerning her intents and prospects, more than I had done yet; and even had made a beginning upon the subject, when, chancing to look up, I saw, by Rhoda's glance out of the window, that she saw somebody coming; and truly, when I lookit, myself, I saw it was Mr. Bernard hastening fast up the road.

Truly, my questionings would have come little speed, if I had begun to them now; so I gave up my own thought, no being able to help myself, and tarried for the young lad coming in. When he did come in, it was easy to see there was a great change

upon him; he was no more like the young man that had been here last night, than an ill-natured person is like to a cheery one. His face was as black as a gloom could make it, and there was passion and bitterness in the very sound of his foot, as he came quick upon the road, looking as if he were crushing something under his heel, at every step he made. What ailed the callant now?—truly, with his hasty spirit, and wearisome temper, it was not easy to ken.

So he came into the room, beside Rhoda and me, in a very evil frame of mind, bringing in such a breath of wind with him, as I saw no signs of in the quiet trees, and the still clouds without. It is no to be thought but that Rhoda, being more concerned, should see the signs of his present frame as soon as me; and truly,

instead of the common greeting, the bairn cried out to him, "What was the matter?" as soon as ever he came in at the door.

The young lad took no note of me being there, more than a kind of bow towards the place I was; for, doubtless, he kent that, whatever his story was, Rhoda would tell it to me, having no other person to carry her bits of troubles to. So he threw himself down on a chair beside her, in his hasty, impatient way, and dashed the hair off his brow, and showed the heated angry colour over all his face.

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" he cried out; "only I have been an absurd fool, and have discovered it—that is all."

Rhoda looked at him for a while, to see how she was to speak herself. But, I doubt not, her own mischief and perverseness got

the better of her, though she might well have had compassion on the young man, seeing he was in real trouble.

"I beg your pardon, Austin; I am sure I do not wish to wound your feelings," she said, in a mocking, grave fashion, "but you cannot suppose this is a very astounding piece of news to me."

Truly, I marvel not the lad was provoked. He gave her a look, as if he mostly could have lifted his hand to her; and if ever an ill bairn deserved it, Rhoda Maitland did at this time.

"You are kind, Rhoda," he said in his bitterness. "I prove myself a wise man, do I not, when I come to seek comfort from you?"

She gave a bit pout with her lip at that, and drew away her chair from him, and said, "Oh, just as you please; it is nothing

to me!" Silly things; for I doubt not they were ever casting out even in this fashion, whenever they chanced to be their lane.

But though Rhoda drummed upon the table with her fingers, and gloomed, and would not look at him, the lad thought better of it, for his own part. He took out some letters from his pocket, and threw them on the table.

"Yes," he said, in a very bitter voice, "my appointment that I have been building so much upon—my tardy fortune that was for my own sake at last, and for which I thanked my generous patron so warmly—fool! fool! How do you think it came to me after all? Or, perhaps indeed I am wasting all my passion, and you knew of it before."

"Knew of what before?" said Rhoda,

being impatient by this time, as was little wonder. "If you have been so very foolish hitherto, Austin, you might try to be reasonable now ?"

"Very well," said the young man, his e'en flashing upon her ; "my lord's influence as he reluctantly confesses, was not exerted at my suit. It was not for me, but for that young ass, Ledaway, that this mighty piece of patronage was done. I am indebted to *him* for it—and the puppy writes to me to tell me so himself!"

Now, minding what an innocent young lad this Mr. Ledaway lookit, I was but ill-pleased to hearken to this, as may be thought; but for all that, I did not say a word myself. As for Rhoda, she took it in a bye-ordinary quiet manner, which, doubtless, was very aggravating to this impatient lad ; for when she drew the letters

to her, and began to read them, he started up from his chair, and paced about the room till the very boards rang under his foot. He was of a most fierce and undisciplined spirit, and would not even take the pains to try to subdue himself.

So Rhoda read the letters over, very slow and particular, till, to speak true, even I myself, glancing up at them from my seam, was in a manner impatient, and then she folded them up, and laid them on the table, and turned round to him again.

"I have read them," said Rhoda. "I think they are very proper letters, and you are simply in a passion. What do you mean?"

Truly, she was enough to put this wild lad daft; but I was feared to see the passion in his face.

"What do I mean!" he said, his voice

being hoarse with the tumult of his thoughts. "Do you think I will bear being indebted to this empty blockhead—I! Do you think I would accept any advantage, small or great, that came through him?"

With that, she looked up at him in a most saucy way, springing up from her seat. "Why should you be so much better than he?" cried out Rhoda. "How dared you do him a service? He ought to have fought you immediately for your presumption. You gave him the money of your own will, and now you hate him for it. It is he who ought to hate you! I do not believe he is a blockhead. If he were here, I think I should rather a great deal have him than you."

The bairn kent better the kind of metal she had to meddle with than the like of me. He looked at her, fierce and furious for a

moment, then made a step forward as if he would have grippit fierce hold of her, and carried her away—and then turned round with a loud short laugh, grinding his heel upon the floor; but truly, he had not a single word to say.

"I had much rather have him than you," cried Rhoda, in her saucy way, "one would have some chance of comfort with a man like that; he would not be cross and disagreeable, and scold one for ever as you do. Take back the money you gave him, Austin, and then you will be equal with him; but how dare you do him a service if he must not help you? You did it out of contempt, and he does it out of kindness. You may be equal to him if you take back the money; but I am sure he is better than you."

"Equal to him is a pretty fiction; he is

a rich fool, and I am—." The callant stoppit. I would not say but he was abashed himself at what he was near going to say.

"What are you?" said Rhoda—and I marvelled to see the sense the bairn had—"a poor tutor, or a philosophic vagabond, like Dr. Primrose's son, when you might be a gentleman and go into parliament and into society, and all sorts of things—you told me so yourself. But you had rather be grand and sulky, and give it all up—all because you will not be obliged to Mr. Ledaway, but hate him, and want to be superior to him. I am sure he is superior to you. I had rather have him if he were here."

Till she said the last word, the lad was waiting holding out his hand, as if his meaning was to bid her farewell, and rush forth

from our presence; but just that last word stoppit him. It was a very fierce laugh, I will not dispute, and I would not for much siller have had Mr. Ledaway, poor callant, in Mr. Bernard's presence, just at this time; but for all that he sat down again, winning over his rage and his fury, and constrained to see how daftlike it all was, in spite of himself.

"You are irresistible, Rhoda, when you use the *argumentum ad hominem*," he said, with his bit short angry laugh again, and syne he took up the two letters and tore them all up into very small bits and scattered them—he was no blate, being in a strange house!—over the carpet in Mary's parlour; and with that I came forward to the two perverse bairns myself.

"Mr. Bernard," said I, "take you back your siller—it was a very wise thought,

though it did come out of this young thing's head--take back what you gave him, and then you will not have the burden of a good deed upon your mind, nor need to keep any grudge at this innocent young man."

The lad started up again, when I spoke to him.

"Miss Maitland," he said, "go away; no man can fight two women single-handed. You are very complimentary, you ladies! I owe your favourite something for all your pretty speeches. *I* keep a grudge at him! You will say I am jealous of his commanding intellect after that!"

I shook my head, being troubled—for envy is sorer than even jealousy, and a meaner thing—and though I did not say a word, I well believe that the lad, being guilty in his own spirit, read it in my look. He

grew very red, a sore burning, paining colour; and by the way his e'en fell, truly, I saw, for the first time, that he thought shame of himself. When I saw this sign of grace, I made haste to go away forth of the room; and, truly, I was not out of the door when Rhoda and him were battling again; but the bairn had right upon her side, this day.

CHAPTER XX.

I saw no more of Rhoda that day, till Grace and her came for me in Grace's own little carriage to go down the road to Sunnyside. We were to be all at the Manse that night, Claud and Grace having their dwelling there; and Mary, also, was going with us to Sunnyside. Truly, I doubted not it would be a grand jubilee for Jenny, when we all came in sight upon the brae, being the folk, both young and old, that were

most thought upon in her e'en; though, doubtless, she would grudge very sore that we came all this length of gate, and brought none of the bairns.

Now Rhoda was not to call worse than ordinary, in any way, but still bore tokens upon her that she had been troubled with anger in some degree, and was not just mistress of herself; and when we passed Mr. Bernard nigh-hand to Burrowstoun—he had doubtless walked the whole road, poor lad, and was wearied, seeing it was a very long road, near upon six miles, and he was no without a sprinkling of summer dust upon him, and gave but an ill-willy look at us, in our pleasant carriage—when we passed him, as I say, the two give sidelong glances one at the other, and said not a word, having had a real outcast, as it was evident to me and being clear in their own minds no to

make it up, though they were yearning to 'gree again all the while. Truly, I was not much troubled concerning the continuance of an outcast like that.

But he would not come to his dinner at the Manse, no, though Grace took the pains to press him, and—being sorry for the callant—I tried myself. He was a dour lad, when his spirit was up, and would not yield. And Rhoda, she made a mock at him, pretending to be apart to me—as if he did not hear every word she said, and as if she did not mean him to hear! that no doubt Mr. Bernard was tired, and was not strong, poor fellow, and could not be expected to walk back again. Such a glint he gave her, out of the corner of his eye! but he would not have been so wrathful had he heard her sore sigh when we turned round the corner of the brae, and left him

behind, and went fast along between the two ash trees up to Sunnyside.

Jenny was just out of her wits with joy, as might be thought; but, truly, every mortal has their ain cares. Being in my own house, and both Grace and Mary liking it so well, and for the sake of auld days, we behoved to break bread in Sunnyside; and Jenny, kenning we were coming, had taken great pains, poor body, to set out the table with flowers upon it, and all the old silver things, the which looked very well, though I say it. Also, Jenny had gotten a basket of early strawberries—they were very early for our part of the country, being only June —and a very bonnie china jug, that I had a great regard for, having been in the house as long as I could mind, had been standing by the side of the berries with cream in it, waiting upon our coming. But the time

Jenny came to open the door, what did the misfortunate bairn, Nelly, her niece, do, but go in her lane to take a look at the table? and when the bairns and me went into my parlour, Nelly came fleeing out with the cream all spilled down her apron, and upon the floor, at the side of the table, was my bonnie china jug, broken in pieces, and the good cream all soaked into the carpet, and the whole look of the place clean destroyed. Truly, I did not wonder at it—Jenny, poor body, after all her expectations fairly put up her apron to her e'en and cried—to take such pains, all to be overthrown by that evil spirit of a bairn! Though the young folk were more like to laugh, I was very vexed for Jenny, kenning how disappointed she behoved to be.

"And just the time I was most heeding!" said Jenny to me, aye with a sob intill her

apron, when I spoke to her apart myself, "when I had just set my heart to let Miss Grace and Miss Mary see that Sunnyside was aye like itself. Eh, Miss Marget! keep me in patience when I get my hands on her! but she's away to her mother's as swift as an arrow, and I'll neither see nor hear tell of her till I gang ower, my ain sel—though its my thought that Job himsel, honest man, would have taken less fash than Jenny—to bring her hame."

"Bless me, Jenny!" said I, "the like of this must not be; and if I am out of the house myself, I will not put up with this fash and trouble for a faithful person like you, that should have rest in your old days."

So with that Jenny made me her bit curtsey, and put down her apron from her e'en.

"Naebody but yoursel would take the thought," said Jenny, "but, Mem, if its on my account—though I will allow, being so sore for mischief, and very red-headed, and a misfortunate thing, whatever she lays hands on, the like of that lassie is no credit to the house—but as I was saying, if its on my account—its ill giving reasons, Miss Marget, and, doubtless, I maun even send her hame if it's your pleasure, and I'm no repining—but, truly, if it was just on my account, I would not say but I'm very well content with the ill-deedy bairn myself."

The plaguit body! was I to be aye finding out what her true meaning was? Truly, I was very near being ill-pleased.

"You must even take your ain will, Jenny," said I, "though, truly, she has wasted more siller breaking my good things, than she ever has been worth, either to you

or me; but I would not send her away either, if you set your mind to make her do right; for, doubtless, she is little credit to any person at this time."

Now, what did Jenny do, but give a bit fuff at this, and would fain have taken part with the misfortunate thing—for she could not bear to hear her ain friends blamed. So, truly, having plenty upon my hands, without casting out with Jenny, I came back to my parlour, where Grace and Mary were standing, in pleasant converse about all the old things, minding one another of their bairns-plays, and the stories of their youth; and Rhoda was her lane at the window, playing tunes upon the panes, with her bit restless fingers, and aye as if she was looking for some person—the foolish bairn!

She was very discontent that whole day,

and would not settle to anything; but she never sought to get out her trouble, in any manner, till late in the night, when Mary, and Mr. Allan, and me, were going back to Lilliesleaf, from the Manse, and were in the mind to walk, seeing it was a very fine night; and Grace and Claud behoved to come forth with us, to convoy us upon the road. As we went out at the door, Rhoda came to my side, in the dark, and grippit my arm, and would not be denied that she would go too. It was a very bonnie summer night, warm and soft, and no to call dark either, though there was little light in it, but a dusk of pleasant gloaming, that was very bonnie to see. But truly, there was little peace in the heart of this bairn, though you would have thought no person could be perturbed among such quiet. She keeped me lingering far behind the

rest, and aye held me back, and poured out all her troubles. They had parted in real wrath, and were clean broken with one another; and he was to throw up his place, and she was to break the troth-plight between them, and they were never, all their days, to see one another any more.

"I am sure I do not care—I am quite sure I don't care," Rhoda said, aye putting up her hand again, to put away the tears from her eyes. "He always has been very cross and peevish, and I don't suppose *he* minds, if I were to die to-morrow. It is nothing to me! I should just like to see him once again, to tell him so—and, I wonder what he will do—what, in the world, will he do? He hates everybody, now—but I should like to tell him that *I* do not mind, and it is nothing to me. Heigho!—I wonder where he is to-night."

She had spoken loud out, in her thoughtless way; and I started very sore, when I saw something moving nigh by the hedge, and heard a voice say, "Here, Rhoda!" and felt her spring from my side, as if some person had stricken her. They could neither 'gree when they were together, nor abide apart. And this foolish lad had even walked up the whole road, to linger about the Manse gates, though he was too proud to come in. They were a very well-matched pair, as ever was, being both most perverse bairns.

So, truly, Rhoda, being taken in this manner, did not ken well what to do; but tried first to laugh, and syne cried, when that failed her; and no being able to flout at him, behoved to cry out again, among her tears, that it was nothing to her, and she did not care! though, doubtless, he

would have been but a very easy discouraged lad, and had less spirit than I gave him credit for, if he had not kent better than that. So, it being even so, and me not the person, seeing I was an aged woman, and had little concern with such vanities, to be the judge between two bairns, whose greatest pleasure was to plague one another, I even left the two to themselves, and took my road on, to make up to our own bairns, which I did, maybe, in the space of five minutes, and so went home in a douce and seemly fashion, having the help of Claud, my nephew's, arm; and I laid my charge upon him, to offer the young lad, Mr. Bernard, a night's up-putting at the Manse, or else to send him to Lilliesleaf, seeing the lad was a stranger, paughty as he was, and it was a very lone, long road, to travel down to Burrowstoun that night. So, being

at the gate of Lilliesleaf, we even bade them all good-night; and, though I saw two folk afar off in the dark, that I kent well to be Rhoda and Mr. Bernard, I took no note of them, but parted from Claud and Grace, and went in with Mary and Mr. Allan, and went straightway up the stair, to my rest. Truly, I never was more perturbed, all my days, than I was with the nonsense fancies of these two ill-willy bairns.

CHAPTER XXI.

I HAD but little rest or comfort for two or three days after that, having much troke with Rhoda—no to say it was my will but just the constant seeking of this ill-willy bairn—for now at last the two of them, having had so very sore an outcast, had come to see in some manner, that they behoved to ken their own mind. And what with being scoffed at by Rhoda, and reasoned with by graver folk, and seeing it was bairnly to abide in a pet at the young lad, Ledaway—

and that the like of this showed a poor spirit instead of a grand one—Mr. Bernard came in a good hour, to think great shame of himself, and even won so far as to write a very stiff, ill-worded letter (for all he was by nature a very clever lad; but truly, a jealous temper is very sore in the way of good writing, as well as of most other things) making his thanks to the other young man. And that being done, and Rhoda and him both kenning that it was not canny to try such another outcast again, the lad was anxious, as was natural, to be married, and put the like of such troublous things clean out of hand. I would not say that Rhoda had very great objections herself; but she was not like to cease from her perverseness in such a brief space, and great trouble and fash there was, as ever I saw, in settling everything at the last.

"You think just the same—I know you do," cried out Rhoda to me, when we were our lane. "It is very hard to come out of romance into common-place. We are not like the lovers in books, Austin and I. I am too much like poor papa for that; but we do think sometimes, after all, of something grand and *spirituel*, and of great troubles, and great sorrows, and great courage, and of being all the world to each other. Oh, bathos! for I know what would happen if we were married. We should wonder who would call, and who would invite us; and instead of something heroical, we would scheme for getting on in society, and being asked out and making friends—and at home it would be all about money and the bad cook, and the poor little boy in buttons who never would grow into a big footman. It is always the way—you know it is; and

however sentimental people are before, it is not sympathy and support, and all that stuff, but what is it to be for dinner, and how the bills are to be paid, after they are married—you know it is."

Now truly I could not but turn aside when I heard that, and smile to myself; for doubtless there was truth in what this ill bairn said. Many a young thing—and, in my thought, *most* young things, seeing the heart is stirred at that period of folk's life—has a grand thought, kenning nothing, of what life is to be when the great trial of the outset is overpast; and bairns in that season make bonnie pictures to themselves of the two hearts that are to be one, and of days and deeds above the common doing of this world, the which it has often been, in a manner, a divert to me, to see sliding down into the cares of a house, and the trouble of fending for a family,

and the charge of bairns, as is the common lot. So that I would not say but it takes the like of me, a single gentlewoman, unacquaint with the real fash and trouble of that estate, to carry pure to the end of mortal days, the first grand thoughts of youth.

"But my bairn," said I—"though whiles it may be hard to mind upon this, as I will not doubt—the paying of the siller, and the spreading of the table are God's appointing, even the same as grander things; and truly the daily cares of this life are neither mean nor common except in folk's thought."

Now first the young thing laughed, and then she came close up to me, and put her arms about me, and lookit close into my face. "I should have thought so had I been *your* child," said Rhoda, winking her e'en very fast to shake off the tears; "but I am only poor papa's daughter, and Austin is like

me. We only belong to the world, Aunt Margaret, and everything is mean and common to us, when it is small and poor."

"Whisht, my bairn," said I, "you are no to say that to me—for it behoves you to learn better, you two young folk, and to take hold upon another world, which will even make this one all the cheerier; and there is both content and comfort in poverty, Rhoda, many a day, and you maun even make it up in your ain spirit with grander thoughts, and the riches will be all the better when they come. And, truly, my dear bairn, the grandest thing to make the ways of this world pleasant ways, is aye to keep within yourself a right remembrance of the Lord."

The poor bairn! she put her arms close about me, and leaned her head down on my shoulder, and wept tears. No just for what

I said—but many a thing was in Rhoda's mind, and she was moved, poor bairn! and had no person to bring her troubles to but me. But I should not say troubles either, for they were just tumults, and the moving and the striving of her own spirit. Truly, for all their outcasts, and the trouble they gave to sober folk, they were very well mated, in respect of being like one another, Rhoda and her bridegroom. They were both very ill bairns; and though there was but little reason between the two, I would not say but there was plenty kindness; and their upbringing had been after the same fashion, and the aim of both of them was towards the same thing. And I was not feared but they would do very well together, though I would have been far more content if I had seen in them a warmer heart unto the ways of godliness; which, doubtless, are profitable

for all things, and well becoming both to age and youth.

All this time I was still abiding in Lilliesleaf, that we might all be near together while Grace and Claud made their visit to the Manse, but I saw not near so much of Mary now as I had been used to do when her and me were our lane. She had much on her mind at this time, counselling Mr. Allan in his plans and his ways, which were many, and taking careful order to her own house. There was but little change made upon the house of Lilliesleaf itself; and I would not say but what their manner of life, though it was quiet, was more like great folk than it had ever been—for Mary was a wise woman to discern what was safe to do, and guided her lot with a careful hand, and took such thoughtful tent of Mr. Allan, that instead of finding downfall out of their gay estate, it

was as visible to the young man himself, as it was to other folk, that there was not another house ordered like to this, in the whole countryside, and as cheery as a house could be. I say this because it was not till long after that I found out, even my ownself, what my bairn had done, and how, in truth, there *were* great changes, and many a manner of wasting siller, stoppit at that time in the house of Lilliesleaf; and how it was Mary's own wisdom and good guiding that made the thrift of a better fashion than the wastry, and keeped both credit and comfort. And the more I came to ken of the constant care she took, and all the trouble of this big house upon her own hand, truly, I marvelled ever the more at the discretion of my dear bairn. As for Mr. Allan, he keeped neither horse nor hound more than were needed about the house, and set himself to his por-

tion of the work in a manful manner, so as it was heartsome to see him ; and from that day —for, truly, it was even just the turn in a man's life that makes a spoon, or spoils a horn—this young man grew more and more a name and a credit in the countryside. For a certain space, doubtless, they behoved to be very canny to get the better of all the wastry of the byegone time ; but it was Mary's ambition to have better visitors about the house than the like of Lord Burrowstoun, and Lady Julia, who were far from great folk in a bigger world than ours, though by reason of their titles, and keeping up much appearance, they lookit grand enough in a country place. And, truly, Mary had them to see her, that would never have gone to the Castle ; and had many a friend, far and near, that were little to be thought of as equal neighbours to the minister's daughter of Pas-

turelands; and so it came to pass that, after a measure of years, there were no two questions who was the most considered man in the county. And seeing he had made himself both well worthy, and of much consequence to the folk, it was not long till the very man that sat in the house of parliament itself, with a hand in all the affairs of state, and much concern in every matter that was for the good of Scotland—not to say Burrowstoun—was just no other person than Allan Elphinstone, of Lilliesleaf!

I am missing over things near at hand when I speak this; but, truly, I must even end my speech before I meddle with what remains. Mary, my niece, had ever her hand more full of cares than had my bairn Grace —it never was given to the one to dwell in quietness like to the other—and many a troublous thing that was of every day coming

to Mary, would have been a stormy and great event in the quiet house of Oakenshaw, which was a wonderful providence to my sight. But for all that, I will not say but Mary was full as happy among the burdens of her lot, and even now when the two callants are growing older, and are ever more charge and more anxiety every day. Cosmo is very fain to be a sodger, whatever either father or mother can say to him—and it is just a comfort, in the like of this fighting time, to ken that the callant is too young—and as for Claud, though he is but a laddie, he is very great at the mathematics, and abides much at Oakenshaw; and Grace is wont to say that Mary has laid half her burden at our door—for, truly, I am free to say, half a dozen such genty bairns as my Maggie, are no to be compared with the trouble of one wild callant—especially, seeing

he is sorely given to mechanics, and ever making inventions—in a quiet minister's family like to ours at Oakenshaw.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was just the August of this same year —no later—when we all gathered once more to be at the marrying of Rhoda Maitland. There was a great controversy among the rest of the bairns where it was to be; and Rhoda herself first gave her word for one place, and syne for another, being changeable in her mind, as was to be thought. Truly, a more fashious season I never mind; but at last it was settled that the most seemly and fitting place was Oakenshaw,

being, in a manner, the bairn's lawful home —all the right home she had ever had, poor thing, in this unkindly and cauldrife world. Mr. Bernard, by this time, was entered upon his vocation; wherefore, it was late in August, when the busy time for politics was bye, when the bridal was to be. And the two had settled between themselves not to have a right home of their ain to tarry in, as would have seemed most meet to the like of me, but to take a certain small space of travel themselves, and then to be content with some bit small house furnished to their hand, in a right place for fashion. Truly, fashion is a weary thing when folk take so much thought for it; and when Rhoda laughed, and said to me, that "getting on in society," as the bairn called it, would be their trade, and great part of their prospect would depend on that, truly, I will not say that I had any very right perception of what the bairn could mean.

But it was just a bye-ordinary thing to see the commotion it made in our house; for, by this time, I was returned back to Oakenshaw, and had taken up my dwelling there, to flit no more till the end came. The two bairns were both English, and bred up in a different kirk (poor things! it was but little either the one or the other of them kent about the odds) from ours—so though it was out of a minister's house that Rhoda was to be married, and though the thoughtless young thing would fain have had Claud, my brother, come all the road from Pasturelands ance errand, for this very purpose, never thinking how our form differed from what she was used to—it was thought most meet that they should be wedded after their ain manner, by the English minister, and in the kirk, as is the fashion of English folk. Maggie, and Mary, and Susie—for the whole family had come together once more—were

to be bridesmaids; and the divert Rhoda made to herself in dressing the three bits of bonnie things, was a pleasant sight to me. Also, nothing less would serve the wilful bairn but Jenny behoved to be sent for out of Sunnyside, and came travelling upon the railroad to her own sore surprise, poor body, seeing she had never been so far from home all her days before; and it was just a divert to see the delight of Jenny when Rhoda took her, her ownself, to look at the grand bridal things, and all the bonnie presents she had got, and the beautiful lace, and the grand veil, and all the bits of ornaments, that were fit for a fairy queen, as was Jenny's word, and far finer than either Mary or Grace had gotten, when our ain bairns were brides. And syne Jenny was given into the hands of Cecy, Maggie's nurse, to see the house, which was the grandest house, saving Lilliesleaf, that the poor body had ever looked

upon; and truly, Jenny came to me, greeting and wiping her e'en, when that day was ended, and no able to contain herself for joy at the grand fortune of all our own bairns.

"Did I think it was a place like this, Miss Marget?" said Jenny, "and me as free with Miss Grace as if she was aye our ain bairn in the small bit chamber at Sunnyside? Keep me!—and yon grand bonnie picture, just hersel, upon the wall—and all the haill family and kin dwelling aneath her roof, and no fash in the like of this grand house if there were as many mair—and neither hersel, nor Mr. Claud, a thought changed;—and Miss Rhoda her very sel—that is a thoughtless young thing as ever was—minding upon Jenny! The like of a' this honour and glory, it's just ower muckle for the like of me!"

And for the bairn Rhoda, if she was wild at all seasons, she was clean out of herself to-night; for this young thing would not yield

to be downcast and shamefaced like other bairns, but would keep up her courage to the very last—and pity on the poor lad that had to cope with her, or else to let her torment him to her own wilful pleasure! I was very well-pleased with Mr. Bernard himself; since ever the lad had settled out of his foolish pride, he had taken a better thought of many things, and, truly, was demeaning himsel in a most right and sensible manner this night, and put up with Rhoda, as it was wonderful to see. Poor bit silly thing!—she would not be dauntoned, but for all that she was greatly moved in spirit; and at last, when it was wearing far on in the night, I rose myself, and took her away.

But she would not let me go from her when I took her to her own chamber; and my heart was moved for the poor bairn that had no natural friend to seek unto in the stirring of her heart. It was far out of my way to

have the like of this young bairn clinging about my neck in her passionate manner, when both her and me were needing our rest, seeing the morn's morning would be a trying time; but, truly, seeing I ever had a great kindness for her, I could not find it in my heart, this last night, to flyte upon the bairn.

"I have been very cross, and very wild, and given you a great deal of trouble," said Rhoda, aye keeping her arms about me, "and I wanted very much to be miserable, when I came first, and tried very hard, I know; but I don't think I ever shall be so happy again. I love you, Aunt Margaret—I never will be a good old lady like you; but I love you very much for all that, and I am sure I never shall be so happy again!"

"My dear bairn," said I, "what would you do to me if I were believing that?"

With that Rhoda gave a laugh among her tears, having a consciousness in her own

spirit, what a daftlike thing it was to say, but for all that said it over again; and then she grew quiet for a space of time; and then she dried her e'en, and said low, "I wonder what poor papa would say;" and gave a sigh to him, and came to herself.

So seeing her in a reasonable frame, I tarried to see her laid down, and happed her like a little bairn, myself; and when I went to my own rest, truly, I was very special seeking a blessing upon them both, that had little right kenning of the truth, and took but small pains to order their ways aright before the Lord. They had given me many a thought, these two perverse bairns, and my heart was moved concerning them at this time. But, truly, it is ever a very great and abundant comfort, when folk are anxious about any matter, to put it forth with a faithful heart, into the good hand of the Lord.

The next morning was a very fine autumn

day, as bright as ever could shine upon a bride; and the like of the dressing that was at Oakenshaw that morning, truly, I never mind upon before in such a quiet house. When Jenny saw the three little bairns, all in their white dresses (which were silk, no less, and beautiful they lookit) being brides-maids, what did Jenny do, the foolish body, but sat down upon the floor in the nursery, and grat for pleasure—and I would not say but the water was likewise in my e'en, my own sel. The house was sweet with flowers, every single place in it; and the maids as grand, and as taken up in their white ribbons, as if every one was a bride herself; and every person said that the family could not have shown more respect to Rhoda, if she had been the heiress of the whole house. So we went away to the English chapel, being very early in the forenoon, according to their fashions, and there Rhoda Maitland,

and Austin Bernard, were wedded upon one another, and made their vow; and syne we came home. And truly, from the moment Rhoda entered the door of Oakenshaw, being a married wife, till the time she went forth again, in three or four hours thereafter, with her young goodman, she was just in as wild spirits as a bairn could be, and no more shamefaced than I was, or, may be, no so much; but helped to cut the big cake with her own hand, and had a word for every maid about the house, and kissed Jenny, and did every daftlike thing that came into her head; though I will not say but she had, in a measure, the grace to be more sedate than ordinary, in respect of Austin, and for that day, to my sight, played her wiles upon him no more.

And so the two went away, Rhoda, at the very last, taking a good greet to herself, as she ran forth from the door of Oakenshaw,

no having courage to say farewell to us all after the common fashion; and truly, seeing all the stir that had been in the morning, I will not say but it was a very dowie house that night.

Now for all so thoughtless and perverse as these two bairns were, I am blythe to say they have done far better than could be expected, and live in a very seemly manner, as folk tell me, and have ever a kindly thought for Oakenshaw and us. And now it is well with the house of Lilliesleaf, when the life is full, and the cares not a few, yet where the blessing of God has come to dwell. Truly, there is never as great a quiet there, as is in our kindly dwelling-place; but there is peace at the heart, and the labour of their hands prospers at the good bidding of the Lord, and a blessing has been upon the little bairns. And when I mind upon what I said, at the time of the two

bridals, long ago, when it was but the bit trials of their youth my bairns had over passed, I have the more cause to lift up my voice, now when He has brought them forth out of the deep waters of their elder years, to say how bountiful the dealing of the Lord has been with me and mine, and how the light of His countenance has brightened upon the path of all the bairns.

And now I would even bid farewell to every kindly person that has taken thought of my tribulations, or hearkened to an aged woman's history. Truly, making stories is little better than leasing-making, in a common way; and I would be ill-pleased if folk had that thought of me, that I was writing this, or the like of this, out of my own head. Wherefore, seeing my name—though I am an aged gentlewoman myself, and ken not of such vanities—has been put upon divers idle tales, far different from any story of

mine, I think it even right to let friendly folk ken, *when* I have said all my say. The bairns are well—blessings upon them all!—and I am old and stricken in years, and waiting upon the call of the Lord. It would ill become the like of us to make as if we wearied to be gone, seeing how we have been upheld and comforted all our days; but truly, I am well assured it will be His ain kind voice, and a blessed summons, when it comes to three content folk—being the minister, and Mary, my sister, and me.

THE END.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 055264169